

BRAZIL'S GEOPOLITICAL LEVER IN THE SHAPING OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POLITICS

LA INFLUENCIA GEOPOLÍTICA DE BRASIL EN LA CONFIGURACIÓN DE LA POLÍTICA REGIONAL Y GLOBAL DE AMÉRICA DEL SUR

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RESUMEN:

Brasil y los otros estados BRICS (Rusia, India, China y Sudáfrica), como potencias emergentes, se han posicionado como los principales actores regionales internacionales y juntos están desafiando el liderazgo mundial unilateral. Este artículo presenta el argumento de que la perspectiva de ser un estado BRICS ayuda a cada nación a proyectarse como un actor político mundial, pero que podría torpedear la proyección de posicionamiento como líder regional como en el caso de Brasil en la región sudamericana. Otros factores como la influencia de fuerzas económicas, políticas y militares externas podrían contribuir a frenar e incluso a limitar la consolidación de Brasil como líder de la región. Para ilustrar esto, este artículo emplea el modelo geopolítico de Modelski para explicar el ascenso y el declive de las potencias mundiales en combinación con algunos elementos de la Teoría de Posicionamiento. La evidencia se basa en un conjunto de datos documentales y emplea un análisis de contenido cualitativo para analizarlo e interpretarlo.

Palabras claves: Brasil, Geopolítica, BRICS, Sur América, Liderazgo global y regional

ABSTRACT:

Brazil and the further BRICS (Russia, India, China and South Africa) states, as emerging powers, have positioned themselves as the leading regional international actors and together are challenging unilateral world leadership. This article presents the argument that the prospect of being a BRICS state helps each nation to project itself as a political world player, but that it could torpedo the projection of positioning as a regional leader as in the case of Brazil in the South American region. Other factors such as the influence of external economic, political and military forces might contribute to slowing down and even constraining the consolidation of Brazil as a leader of the region. In order to illustrate this, this article employs Modelski's geopolitical model to explain the rise and decline of world powers in combination with some elements of the Positioning Theory. The evidence is based on a set of documental data and employs a qualitative content analysis for analyzing and interpreting it.

Key words: Brazil, Geopolitics, BRICS, South America, Global and Regional leadership

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Introduction

In the context of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) states and emerging markets, researchers, such as Armijo and Sotero (2007), affirmed that Brazil's unintended "destiny" is to become a major world power by the middle of the twenty-first century and that the states like Russia, India, and China are likely to achieve a similar status by the end of this century.

On one hand, such a view suggests that Brazil has developed a leading state strategy which, independent of the ideology of its governments, seeks to ensure its own economic and political playground while continuously increasing its economic potential and impact on world politics. On the other hand, the constant expansion of the area of economic and political influence of the BRICS states presented a world scenario in which their interests started overlapping or even clashing. For instance, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, China became one of the most important economic partners in South America. In this context, China suddenly became Brazil's second industry and trade partner after the US, and was expanding its economic influence over the whole continent in such a way that Brazil's economy found it difficult to counterweight the force of the Chinese market (Cardoso and Holland, 2010). Hence, a rapprochement between them started growing on the basis of the BRICS summits.

At first, the conferences organized by the BRICS states in Russia (2009) and in Brazil (2010) conjured up the idea that a coalition of powers were about to take place and "a power in the making" was seen (Quiliconi, Sager and Tussie, 2016) in order that together they cooperate to avoid conflicts of interest and have more strength to challenge the uni-polarity of the world rule-making system. With this, there was a presumption that Brazil's leading role in the Union of the South American Nations (UNASUR) could have been relegated to a second agenda.

Instead, when Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was president, Brazil's interest in the regional leadership helped to shape the South American region and to consolidate it in the following years as an intergovernmental organization, despite the gradual decline of its leadership of the region since 2011 (Deciancio, 2016). Brazil is regarded as a "questioned" regional leader (Pinheiro and Gaió, 2016) despite the clear intentions of taking leadership during the period of Lula. On the other hand, the last summits of the BRICS states in Fortaleza, Brazil (2014), and in Ufa/Bashkir, Russia (2015), showed a progressive development in the agenda of the BRICS states towards working together.

However, the recent crisis in the Brazilian government, the stagnation of the economy, the internal socio-political issues of some of the states and the changing political tendency of the governmental leaderships in the South American region represent a serious challenge to the leading regional power in this decade. Hence, a series of questions arise regarding the strengthening of the hegemony of the USA and the role of the BRICS states.

The stagnation of the emerging economies and, within this that of the Brazilian economy, can affect the young institutions of South America such as the UNASUR, and above all the leadership of Brazil in the South American region. With regard to these issues for the BRICS and particularly for Brazil, this study focuses mainly on three questions: Do the BRICS states represent the end of the world hegemony and the beginning of a multi-polar world in which Brazil can play a stronger role? Has the BRICS forum strengthened Brazil's ambition to become a world-influential player? What chances has Brazil of strengthening its leadership in the region in the light of being one of the BRICS states?

The analytical result of this study argues that despite the present global geopolitical and geo-economic context, multi-polarity of the world-leadership is inevitable, even though the period of US hegemony has not completely ended. Hence, Brazil has slowly positioned itself as a global player, whereby the BRICS forum has been well used by Brazil in its intention of finding its place in world politics. However, this article argues that its priority, which is to shape the global agenda and act as a global player has torpedoed its intention of playing the regional leadership role in South America.

In order to develop this argument, this investigation found explicative support in Modelski's theoretical model to explain the cycles of world-leadership, a model which has its objectivist ontological roots in realist political theories and its epistemological foundation underpins a positivist perspective (Modelski, 1987). These explicative assumptions have been complemented by some elements of "The Positioning Theory Angle" as developed by Van Langenhove, Zwartjes and Papanagnou (2016) in order to further strengthen the explanation and understanding of regional leadership. These fundamental elements are above all "willingness" to lead the region, "capacity" to do so, and the "acceptance" by the immediate international environment (Van Langenhove, Zwartjes and Papanagnou, 2016). Methodologically, this is a case study, based mainly on the qualitative analysis of documents and secondary sources, whereby the application of a qualitative content analysis as suggested by Hermann (2008) and Ascanio Guevara (2010) has enabled an explicative line of investigation.

These arguments are developed in three main sections. The first part highlights the present geopolitical position of the BRICS states in light of Modelski's theoretical model to explain the cycles of world leadership, and clarifies the challenging prospect of Brazil as a rising power towards the shaping of a multi-polar world. The second part focuses on the geopolitical importance of being one of the BRICS states in terms of shaping and strengthening Brazil's global role. The third part of this article presents the role of leadership in South America in the light of being part of BRICS to explore some reasons for Brazil's poor recognition as a regional leadership player. Finally, some conclusions and reflections and suggestions are offered.

The BRICS States in the Global Geopolitical Context: Towards a Multi-polar World?

Our world order has maintained its institutions without undergoing much reform for more than sixty years. These institutions were created mainly with the influence of the present world power, the United States of America (USA), which, after the collapse of the USSR and of bipolarity, has retained its hegemony for the last two decades. However, the financial crisis of 2008, the wars in Libya, the disapproval of direct action from emerging powers in Syria, the signing of the Cancun Declaration on the Unity of Latin America and the Caribbean by thirty two countries of the Americas in February 2010, followed by the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the growing economic influence of the BRICS states, and finally, the unsuccessful fight against the rebels organized as the Islamic State of Iraq (and Syria) have demonstrated that the era of US world leadership is coming to an end and the participation of the emerging international actors is required (Kiely, 2015).

For academics, an explanation as to why such phenomena occur and how world-leaderships emerge and disappear is also required. Some scholars, such as Modelski (1987), have developed a world-leadership cycle to explain such phenomena on the basis of a historical life cycle of world-leaders. According to Modelski (1987), world leaderships are dynamic; therefore, leaderships emerge and disappear in leadership cycles of circa a hundred years of four phases of a similar timeframe that are characterized by wars and international chaos (first phase); domination and the strengthening of world leadership (second phase); weakness and delegitimation (third phase); and deconcentration and disappearance (fourth phase).

In addition to this, the history of the world shows that this dynamic is mainly due to geo-economic causes. However, in the twenty-first century, it can be

said that there are other factors, such as the global environment and pollution, immigration and global security. Indeed, the positive dynamic and development of the economy of a state empowers strong states to become world leaders (Wallerstein, 2003). However, these economic causes also appear in time periods in which the world order also undergoes a political transformation that could influence the transition of powers from regional to world-players. A variety of other factors such as political interests and ideology also play an important role. Derluguian and Goldfrankt (2000) see it as a process of “repetition” in these dynamics with some “variation and transmutation”.

Applying Modelski’s model to explain the present world situation and the role of the BRICS states in world leadership, it could be said that a period of decline of the USA leadership has arrived and at the same time a rise of the influence of emerging economies in world-affairs has been seen since the first decade of the twenty-first century. These states grouped under the acronym BRICS have strengthened their economies by expanding their market and capital worldwide, and have focused their international activity on new international phenomena such as development, the environment and the construction of new international institutions. Consequently, they are challenging world leadership (Kiely, 2015; Duggan, 2015; Martins, 2015).

Unexpectedly, the contenders for world leadership come not from the main US American allies; nor from the European Union or Japan. The challenges come from a different part of the world and they have been building geopolitical and geo-economic networks under the umbrella of international fora of the BRICS states.

From an analytical point of view, the study of the political developments of the past decade within International Relations appears to be rather difficult, especially if we want to consider the term BRICS as a concept of analysis, and within it the leadership of Brazil in the South American region. Nevertheless, there are researchers who have tried to understand and explain the new developments of the world economy and the new geopolitical constellations, taking the acronym BRICS as the starting point of their research to refer to the states mentioned above (Armijo and Sotero, 2007; Pelle, 2007; Koeller and Cassiolato, 2009; Santos-Paulino and Wan, 2010; Nell, 2010; Prys, 2010; Jones, 2012; Crane, 2015; Stuenkel, 2015; Revizorski, 2015, Kiely 2015; Kingah and Quiliconi, 2016; Méndez-Coto, 2016).

The majority of these researchers and many others (Moniz Bandeira, 2006; Goh, 2008; Heisbourg, 2010; Ravi Arvind, 2010) investigated these states and their economic and political potential, referring to them as regional powers, major powers, emerging economies and emerging great powers, among others.

However, the setting of an analytical framework for the analysis of regional powers and their leaderships in their corresponding regions is also difficult in this context due to the variety of controversial questions interrelated with geography, economy and power that have not had a single objective answer. For instance, clarity is lacking regarding the geographical definition of Latin America as well as Europe, whether Russia belongs geographically to Europe or Asia, how power and a states' power can be measured, and how to analyze new groups of global actors such as the BRICS.

Kingah and Quiliconi's (2016) collection of research offers an interesting approach. However, it focuses on the growing global and regional leaderships of the BRICS states without challenging the role of the still existing world leadership; the USA. Notwithstanding this, their work suggests that the leadership of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa within their own regions is certainly unquestionable (Kingah and Quiliconi, 2016).

Some years before, Nolte (2010) also presented eleven elements to analyze a regional power which are, among others, a constant increase in population, economic growth, technology and its overwhelming territorial expansion compared to their neighbor states. Furthermore, these states, considered regional powers, exhibit a high level of development in their military, political and organizational capability which put them in an advantageous position to influence the regional affairs, shaping the geopolitical and political-ideational construction of the region (Nolte, 2010). Most of these factors are highlighted by Pinheiro and Gaio (2016) and Deciancio (2016) who focus on the case of Brazil in their analysis of Brazilian regional leadership.

The BRICS states, as a political conglomerate, have contributed more than a quarter to the total growth of the world economy and were the least affected by the global economic crisis of 2008 and 2009. However, the recent economic crises caused by the sinking prices of commodities, mainly oil, have strongly impacted on the BRICS states. In particular, Brazil's economy suffered a contraction of 3.8 per cent in 2015 and is expected to have a contraction of a minimum 3.8 per cent again for the year 2016 (International Monetary Fund, 2016:19). Moreover, the internal political and social problems are a big barrier for development and international projection of the strongest state of South America.

Despite this, not only is it important to see the material capabilities or capacities to understand and explain the regional leadership but it is also necessary to analyze the willingness to be a regional and global player and their acceptance by the regional and world community as suggested by the Positioning Theory Angel developed by Van Langenhove, Zwartjes and Papanagnou (2016).

In this context, Quiliconi and Kingah (2016) show that the BRICS states have reached a high level of acceptance, to the extent that they could be considered as regional leaders, despite the suggestion that the Brazilian leadership has been debilitated. However, at the beginning of the rapprochement of these five states, the BRICS states were rather cautious in claiming world leadership and opted to apply national diplomatic strategies such as the Chinese “soft balancing” strategy which refers to the global expansion and strengthening of the national economy (Wang, 2010). In recent years, the regional and global leadership of the BRICS states has been more noticeable as shown by the last BRICS Summits. For example, in the Ufa-Russia Summit, 2015, the agenda was not only restricted to a meeting and a joint statement of the Presidents as happened in the summits of 2008 and 2009. The agenda of the last summit included five main fields of discussion. These included the strengthening of international peace and security by promoting BRICS’ interest in the international arena, the facilitation of multilateral financial cooperation and reform of the international financial system, the enhancement of trade and economic cooperation within the BRICS states, the initiative of expanding social cooperation of the BRICS countries, and the deepening of their collective work in areas of humanitarian cooperation. All these general topics involved the participation of representatives of about twelve different ministries of every BRICS state and contained a great variety of themes that were discussed between the single ministries of the BRICS states.

Indeed, contrary to what Duggan (2015) suggests, there are various instruments that have been collectively used by the BRICS states, which ultimately have fulfilled their single geopolitical agency and could strongly influence the agenda of global politics as suggested by Ho Chung (2013), and by Kingah and Quiliconi (2016), for instance, the proposals to reform the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as the proposal of the BRICS states to replace the dollar by the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) for international trade. Finally, the project for the creation of the “New Development Bank” (NDB) could enable them to work together and challenge the old institutional architecture that has been monopolized by the USA.

However, some analysts believe that these developments were, at the outset, mainly responding to the singular interest of these countries. The ideas to transform the unipolarity of world leadership into a multi-polar world in which they can better represent their national interests were mainly driven by their individual national interest (Dailami and Masson, 2009). Notwithstanding this, and as shown in the last BRICS Summits, their aim seems to be a collective interest in changing the international system in the direction of a multi-polar world.

Despite the critics on Modelski's (1987) World Leadership Cycle regarding its "historical determinism" and classical approach to geopolitics (Flint, 2006: 157-158), his model, presented in Figure 1, helps to illustrate the present geopolitical world scenario, in which the BRICS states are situated, and the challenge they represent to the world-leadership in order to position a new world-order. The model contains four explanatory phases with similar time frames: global wars/international chaos (phase 1), dominant state rises/ undisputed world leader (phase 2), delegitimization of world leader status (phase 3), and deconcentration of dominance (phase 4). The end of this process will give birth to another hegemon (Modelski, 1987).

The present world scenario and the aim of the BRICS in world politics seems to be aiming towards a world system with many regional powers working within a multi-polar world rather than the one-world-leader system. In this context and in the context of Modelski's model, the place of the BRICS states can be located between the delegitimation and deconcentration phase.

The delegitimation of the present world leader is not a new phenomenon. Many states around the world such as Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Russia, and Iran, among others, have disregarded USA leadership.

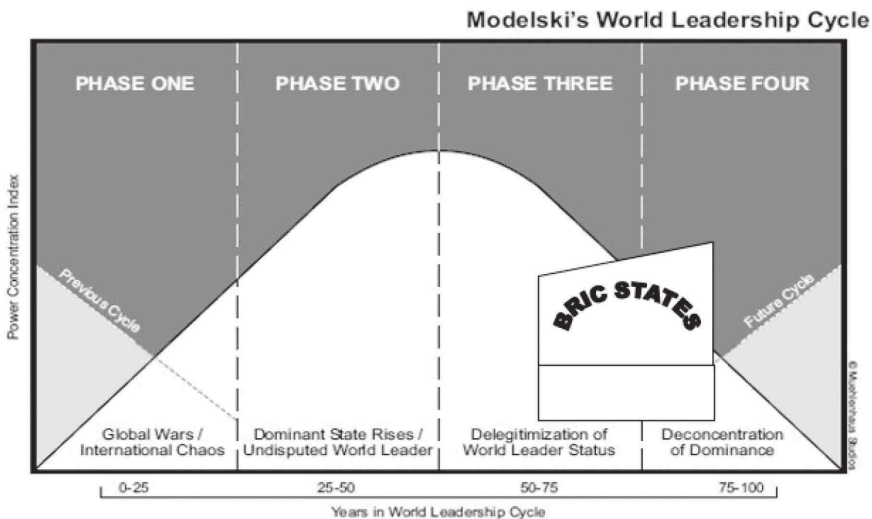


Figure 1. The BRICS states in the present global geopolitical scenario

Resource: Adapted from Flint, C., Introduction to Geopolitics, 2006

Moreover, the majority of Latin America has been impatiently looking for an alternative to USA leadership for the last two decades. The creation of the CELAC in 2011 and the growing role played in international politics by the BRICS states are challenging the monopolization of the institutional system by the hegemony of the USA. This is a clear scenario of transformation in world politics.

Returning to the positioning of the BRICS on Modelski's model as shown in figure 1, the characteristic of deconcentration of world leadership could be found in the string of frustrating failures of the USA to satisfy the expected demands on its leadership, which are having effects on our planet such as global warming, international migration, and the establishment of political stability and peace in the countries of the Middle East. The deconcentration phase can also be recognized in the negative international perceptions of the world leader following the disastrous effect on civilians of its campaign in the so called "war on terror" as well as the invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, of which disapproval has continually increased.

In addition, the recent inaccurate protection of confidential data, particularly concerning diplomatic data of partner states as a consequence of the Wiki Leaks scandal and the ambiguous and unsuccessful intervention in Syria and Iraq to fight the irregular militia group, ISIS, might have serious effects on the long-term reliability and confidentiality of US leadership. All these events imply that in the present phase even USA-friendly states would find it difficult to rely on the expected efficiency of the world power. Therefore, the new rising powers have a favorable momentum to reshape the world order by working together.

However, the statement presented here is certainly a cautious interpretation, given the fact that the USA economy until 2010 showed a massive 26% percent of the global GDP and its military expenditure exceeds 4.6% of its GDP (\$661 billion), being by far the strongest military force in the world. On the contrary, the total military expenditure of the BRICS countries in 2009 was only a third of this; approximately \$219 billion (World Bank, 2010). In addition to this, the stagnation of the economy of most of the BRICS states could also have significant effects on the performance of the emerging powers, not only locally, but also globally. Political instability, local socio-economic crisis and the return of the US influence can also influence the agenda of the BRICS states, as the case of Brazil shows.

The question to be posed to new leaders in this respect is: Are these states interested in working together not only on an economic but also on a political

and military/security basis to change the present world system? The two first summits of the leaders of the BRICS states demonstrated that they seemed to prefer to continue their global projection independently in order to secure their economy and increase their global political influence.

The leaders were neither able to produce a collective instrument to deal with these developments nor did they attempt to define a harmonized way to categorically challenge the world policy system. It appears rather that the two summits held in Russia (June 2009) and Brazil (April 2010) stated their mutual acknowledgment and recognition of the strength of their economic growth. This initial and slow rapprochement has been replaced, however, by a more dynamic and increasingly varied agenda as shown below.

The BRICS Ufa declaration of 2015 clearly states 17 points to work on collectively. Among others, the search for “feasibility of developing a BRICS trade, economic and investment cooperation roadmap for the period until 2020” should be highlighted here as this shows a national interest in collective work of these emerging powers. In this sense, the Ufa collective declaration states that the BRICS aim to collectively work towards maintaining a world order, but within a multi-polar world, where the global institutions function as universal multilateral organizations (BRICS Information Centre, 2016). Moreover, there is not individual action by five completely egoist emerging powers who are only looking after their own national interests; instead the BRICS states have combined their areas of international collective projection at three different levels: maintaining “the formal structures of the sovereign state”, paying attention to “the internal environment with general projection”, and developing an agenda for “the global external environment” (Martins, 2015: 32). These and further aims of the BRICS states highlighted on the Ufa collective declaration 2015 show a positioning of the BRICS states as world players with the clear intention of changing the monopoly of the world leadership for a multi-polar world.

The BRICS as a Lever for Brazil’s Strategy to become a Global Player

The BRICS states represent about 42% of the world’s population, 26% of the territory of the planet and about 27% of the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Their international engagement has rapidly increased since their first summit in 2008. Their last summit took place in Ufa, Russia, in November 2015 and the next, the 8th in a row, is scheduled to take place in Goa, India, in October 2016. The BRICS states have gradually increased their areas of discussion, political coordination and areas of cooperation.

The areas of major interaction, discussion and coordination since 2008 are health, trade, finance and foreign policy.

The foreign ministers and the finance ministers have met eleven and 14 times, respectively, in the seven years since BRICS came into existence as an international forum for the emerging powers (BRICS Information Centre, 2016). In this way, they have substantially enhanced their international activity. At the same time, they have slowly identified factors that reflect the national interest of every country, which enable them to position themselves as global actors in world politics. Evidence of this is their thematic meetings, which were conducted in the last summit in 2015, and those thematic meetings included in the agenda for the next summit in Goa, India, 2016. In total, there were 15 areas of discussion with a variety of yearly meetings in 2015 (Stuenkel, 2015; BRICS Information Center, 2016).

Brazil, as one of the BRICS states, has participated in these meetings and hosted the BRICS Summits on two occasions, namely in Brasilia, 2010 and in Fortaleza, 2014. This is a clear instrument of international political action and worldwide positioning of Brazil. These activities are also clear signals of at least one element of assessment of global BRICS leadership; willingness as suggested by Van Langenhove, Zwartjes and Papanagnou, (2016). Another one, acceptance by other states and international organizations, has demonstrated that at least within the BRICS, IBSA group (India, Brazil and South Africa), the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) and the WTO (World Trade Organization) there has been a high level of leadership acceptance. The other factor for global leadership, capacity, appears to have some restriction particularly due to its poor “infrastructure, trade and defense” (Quiliconi and Kingah, 2016: 251).

However, this assessment does not imply that the opportunities offered by the BRICS forum have not been used by the Brazilian state. On the contrary, there are at least four main global political fields that can be mentioned: economy and finance for development, international trade within the WTO, global security within the Security Council of the UNO (United Nations Organizations) and coordination of positions within the international forum of the G-20 as can be observed in the different summit commitments and summit declarations (BRICS Information Centre, 2016).

In the field of finance and development Brazil has been very active since the first years of the ministerial meetings. In 2012, for instance, Brazil proposed a Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA) for the BRICS states in order to confront a possible financial crisis. One year later in the Durban Summit in South Africa (2013), the BRICS leaders decided to create a contingency reserve

pool of 100 billion US Dollars (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2014). This idea was complemented with the creation of the New Development Bank of the BRICS states in Fortaleza, Brazil in 2014 and was confirmed in the joint declaration of Ufa 2015. These initiatives are fundamental actions of global protagonism (Pinheira and Gaio, 2016).

In the field of international trade within the WTO, the differences between the interest and focus of the BRICS states have been more noticeable. This is related to each member of the BRICS' type of trading product. Whereas Russia and China have a more developed industry and hence they are interested in trading their industrial products, the other states prioritize the trade of commodities and agriculture goods. However, the leadership of Brazil, India and South Africa has been evident since the WTO meeting in Brasilia in 2003 and this rapprochement was strengthened later in order to include the other two members of the BRICS. A first step towards finding a common interest was made in Sanya, China, in 2011. Here, some guidelines of common interest were highlighted. These common strategic interests are openness, pragmatism, solidarity, mutual assistance, inclusiveness and non-confrontation. Following this first step, a contact group was set up to work towards implementing the strategic interest and to present themselves as being more unified in the 8th WTO ministerial meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2011.

In a similar situation as in the situation of the WTO, the BRICS states have a more individualist position within the Group of the 20 (G-20). Nevertheless, their diverse interests have been united through the recent summits. This can be observed in the informal meetings of the BRICS states and their joint pronouncements previous to the WTO meetings in November 2014 in Brisbane, Australia, and in November 2015 in Antalya, Turkey. All these Brazilian experiences in negotiations and engagement at different levels of international politics are examples of a historically "selective multilateralist" state (Quiliconi, Saguier, and Tussie, 2016).

Finally, the area of security has slowly become another field of common interest for the BRICS states. Particularly for Brazil, the reform of the Security Council has been priority and its inclusion as a permanent member has been an objective of Brazilian diplomacy. The Brasilia Summit was especially important for Brazil, as it was during this summit that a collective policy in the area of security was discussed. As a result of this discussion, a common declaration was elaborated in which the BRICS states demanded a "multipolar, equitable and democratic world order, based on international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all states". This perception of how security internationally should be conducted was fur-

ther discussed within the BRICS states one year later as the Security Council brought the cases of Libya and Syria to the discussion table. Although the BRICS states did not come to a full agreement between them about vetoing the no-fly zone for Libya, as discussed in the Security Council, in the case of Syria they agreed not to support an intervention under the norm of Responsibility to Protect, despite the support of the emerging powers for the newly introduced norm (Stuenkel, 2015).

One further characteristic that has accompanied the economic development of the BRICS states is the creation of regional institutions, political and free trade blocks as well as regional, political and security alliances that have been motivated not only by the need of the rising powers to reduce the influence of the world power negotiating in the international fora such as Security Council, G-20 and the World Trade Organization (Klom, 2003; Andrade, 2001), but also by the individual drive of Brazil to gain support from other states in the race to obtain a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Indeed, the wide range of areas of participation and positioning of Brazil in world-politics is beyond the scope of this investigation. However, these examples demonstrate the importance of the BRICS forum for the Brazilian international projection and positioning as a global player.

Has being a BRIC helped Brazil in the shaping of the South American region?

The Brazilian Constitution in its article four states that “the international relations of the Federative Republic of Brazil are governed by the following principles: national independence, self-determination of the people, non-intervention, equality among states, defense of peace, peaceful settlement of conflicts”, among others. This article also includes a paragraph highlighting that “The Federative Republic of Brazil shall seek the economic, political, social and cultural integration of the people of Latin America, viewing the formation of a Latin-American community of nations” (Câmara Dos Deputados, 2010).

In that sense, the creation and shaping of the UNASUR has a constitutional relevance and the role played by Brazil in its creation and shaping is indisputable. However, the projection of Brazil as a global player does not seem to have had much influence over the formation of the UNASUR. As shown by Quiliconi and Kingah (2016), Brazil as a leader in the South American region is questionable.

Whereas at the global level, Brazil appears as an active and recognized politi-

cal player, regionally it appears to be a “leader without followers” (Malamud, 2011). This may be related to a variety of factors. One of these could be the fact that on this side of the hemisphere, the rising power, Brazil, appears to have had an interest in the region in competition with the US in recent decades. This has, in certain form, limited Brazil’s aspirations to perform the role of regional leader in South America in the twentieth century (Sangmeister, 2003), and it appears to have remained a latent non-conformity between them until now.

The antagonism between the two began when Brazil, in accordance with Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, founded the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) in 1991. In the last decade, it became more transparent that the economic and political interests of the two big states, the US and Brazil, continued to diverge. For example, the US attempted to impose a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA/ALCA), whereas Brazil’s main objective was the extension of the MERCOSUR to the whole of South America (Sotero and Armijos, 2007).

With the economic and political fluctuation of recent decades, the discourse and international political practices in the search for the original geopolitical agency of the BRICS states have also helped Brazil to undergo a change in its international projections as shown above. Yet this world political projection is not new. It can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century, to the time of Baron de Rio Branco.

This Brazilian diplomat began organizing the country, solving the border conflicts with the neighboring states and highlighting the local vulnerabilities of the country. From that time, many other politicians, intellectuals and geopoliticians have developed the idea of an internationally influential Brazil. For instance, some Brazilian geopolitics researchers of the twentieth century, such as Meira Mattos and Couto e Silva, suggested in the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s that Brazil would achieve “First World Status” by the end of the last century. However, neither envisaged a union of South American states that seems to be linked to the constitutional mandate which consequently transformed Brazils’ rhetoric towards the rest of the South American states.

Certainly, many international networks were created south of the Rio Grande under the concept of Latin American integration, such as the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA) in 1960, the Latin American Economic System (SELA) in 1975, the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) in 1980, the Rio Group in 1986, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 2011, amongst others. Brazil has been a member state of most of these international organizations. Notwithstanding this, scholars have agreed that Brazil has not convinced its neighbors, the South American

states, of its status as a convincing regional leader (Malamud, 2011; Quiliconi and Kingah, 2016). For some investigators, such as Moniz Bandeira (2006), the lack of a clear leadership in South America is due to the strong influence of the US in the region and its strategic intervention in various sensitive sectors. In that sense, the US would do anything to delay and even prevent the union of the South American States (Moniz Bandeira, 2006).

On the other hand, Brazil showed little interest in integrating South America as a whole economic or political block, before the introduction of this mandate in its national Constitution as mentioned above. Instead Brazil's foreign policy showed an alignment with the US (Hurrell, 2010) until the end of the 1960s. However, in the 1970s, a significant step was made by creating the Amazon Cooperation Treaty, which brought together all South American states with Amazon rainforest.

In the middle of the 1980s, one of the most significant moves in Brazilian South American politics was driven by the democratization process in the continent which brought Brazil and Argentina closer, resulting in the Agreement on the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy. In 1991, new organizations enmeshed these countries, including Uruguay and Paraguay, through the establishment of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and in 2002 the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) was successful in bringing together eight of the twelve South American states in the protection and development of the Amazon rainforest. The ACTO members are Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Surinam and Venezuela.

A first meeting of the heads of the twelve South American states (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Surinam, Uruguay and Venezuela) hosted by Brazil in 2000 signaled Brazil's decision to take the lead on the destiny of the South American region which at the time was going through a period of high resentment towards the US due to the approach of the world leadership in South America. Following this, the divergence of economic and political projects for the region for both the world power and Brazil became more transparent than before, as the US was promoting the construction of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTTA), whereas Brazil openly expressed its discomfort towards this project and urged the South American states to join the sub-regional organizations, the Comunidad Andina de Naciones and The Mercado Común del Sur in order to "counter-balance" the US's dominant agenda setting and "rule-maker" role (Sangmeister, 2003).

In this regard, the period when Brazilian diplomacy suggested that "what is good for the United States is good for Brazil" (Magalhães, 1971) was left be-

hind many decades ago and a phase of “what is good for Brazil is good for South America” began. A policy of good neighborhood and mutual cooperation has predominated, despite the massive differences between Brazil and other South American states. On the other hand, Brazil’s encouraging decision to take the lead in the southern continent has been seen by the US as a contest for the leadership of the geographical area rather than co-operation (Klom, 2003; Munoz Bandeira, 2006; Sotero and Armijo, 2007; Sangmeister, 2003).

Under the umbrella and discourse of an integration of the South American states, initiatives such as the Initiative for the Integration of the South American Infrastructure (IIRSA) organized by Brazil in 2000, have been developed and expanded in the region over the last 16 years, not only by Brazil, but also by other South American states. Following this the process of South American rapprochement, driven by many states including Brazil, has been marked by a process of regionalization. Therefore some scholars such as Malamud (2011) suggest that Brazil has not been convinced to play an evident leadership role in the region. Others suggest that Brazil’s “unconvincing” leadership role is related firstly to poor acceptance by some states in the region (Quiliconi and Kingah, 2016: 251).

Nevertheless, Brazil’s engagement with the project for an institutionalized South American region through the creation of the UNASUR has demonstrated that there are alternatives to the unipolar leadership and to the older international institutions of the continent. Moreover, it has become clear that the existence of a regional institution close to the regional problems can be more efficient than an organization directed from a foreign environment. The participation and creation of the UNASUR as the first institutionalized regional organization that contains all twelve South American states has already helped to satisfactorily solve regional international conflicts. For instance, peace between Ecuador and Colombia which was broken following the bombing of Angostura, Ecuador, by the Colombian Air Force and which killed some members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) in 2008 and 2009, has been re-established

In addition to this point of view, there are at least three more factors that have favored Brazil potentially taking a lead in the region. One factor is the inadequacy of the world leader, the US, to attend to the demands of the South American continent, whose countries find themselves in a phase of economic desperation and lacking international political orientation in order to maintain and further strengthen the regional institutions constructed in recent decades.

Another factor is Brazil’s economic strength that, despite its present stagnation, accounts for the major economic centers of the South American continent. In

addition, its industrial potential is by far the most developed in South America. This puts Brazil in an advantageous position to continue pursuing its leadership role, although the developments in the single economies have continued responding to their national economic interests, which has affected and could even restrain the further development of the Union (Serbin, 2010).

For instance, Chile, Colombia and Peru have taken the path of the single agent and opened themselves to the big economies such as the US, European Union and China by signing bilateral trade agreements. Chile entered into a Free Trade Agreement with the EU in 2003 and with the US in 2004; Peru signed a Free Trade Agreement with China in 2010; Colombia and Peru recently signed a bilateral Free Trade Agreement with the US and the EU. Ecuador is in the final stages of entering a bilateral trade agreement with the European Union, to follow the example of Peru and Colombia, whereas, other states such as Bolivia and Brazil endeavor to negotiate with external economic forces as a block of states (Chiriboga Vega, 2009; Serbin 2010). All these developments show a process that resembles a region without clear leadership.

Moreover, Brazil's South American policy has cautiously avoided the traditional hegemonic practices and has implemented a policy of multilateralism in the continent. For example, within the context of the UNASUR, small countries, such as Ecuador, Guyana or Uruguay, have the opportunity to lead the process of the union through the responsibility of the temporary presidency which rotates between the heads of the member states of the UNASUR (UNASUR, 2008; Álvarez Valdés, 2009). With this, the resistance to a political regional hegemony that tries to impose its geopolitical objectives has been smoothly transformed in an instant to cooperation and active participation amongst/between states.

Finally, this soft Brazilian manifestation of power with its South American neighbors did not suffice either to make it a world player from the hand of the BRICS forum or to play the role of a regional leader in South America. The Brazilian global protagonist projection seems to have paid the cost of a weak regional leadership and poor recognition by its neighbor states (Deciancio, 2016).

Conclusion

This article has as an aim to look for an answer to three main questions which are related to the importance of the BRICS states in their attempt to transform the uni-polarity of the world leadership towards a multi-polar world whose process takes into account the Brazilian leadership projection regionally as well as

globally. In the context of the first question, this paper has argued firstly that regional economic powers continue to rely on their economic growth in order to claim more participation in the world-rule making system that presently finds itself in the last phase of its monopolized world leadership. These clearer indicia are, however, not being used positively by the new rising economies which have recently found some collective mechanisms to challenge the present international system.

Second, Brazil's historical projection of becoming an influential global actor found its perfect lever in the BRICS forum that launched its first event in 2008 and continuously repeated this until 2015. The initial presidential summit has become a forum in which about 17 themes are discussed and coordinated on a global agenda. This development within the BRICS states has catapulted Brazil to the global states in which it can discuss and propose policies of global consequence. Their preparatory meetings just before the G-20 and WTO meetings are clear evidence of the BRICS states' intention to position their agenda in which Brazil is one of its counterparts. However, the recent economic crisis across the planet and the political instability in Brazil present themselves as serious barriers for global projection in the near future.

Third, in this global engagement Brazil has paid a cost at a regional level for being the largest country of South America despite the efforts to institutionalize the region through the creation of the UNASUR. The building of regional politics or blocks for diplomatic discussions, such as the UNASUR and CELAC, signals a clear intention of a Brazilian regional leadership. However, this development in Latin America and particularly in South America has contributed to an increase in the antagonism with the present world leadership which has implemented new strategies to weaken and even restrain the functioning of the main international institutions of the region.

Many states have already fallen into the trap presented in such a strategy such as the bilateral free trade agreements with single states, such as Chile, Peru and Colombia. This strategy of renewed influence on the economy and politics of the region by the USA could further weaken Brazil's world leadership projection and might even restrain Brazil's regional leadership projection.

Finally, the building of South America, as a compact regional space in "the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, energy and infrastructure", has to overcome a variety of challenges which require a more profound analysis due to their complexity. One such complex factor constitutes the ideological-political character of the leaders of the UNASUR in relation to the function of the UNASUR which, since its initiation, has been characterized by a di-

vergence in its functionality. This divergence is related to whether the Union should focus on an integration of the markets towards a single market that may be in concordance with the US liberal philosophy or whether the UNASUR should enclose all aspects such as the political, infrastructural and social in order to develop the socio-economies and to strengthen the negotiating power with external forces in the form of a political regional block (Serbin, 2010).

This ideological divergence could affect the functionality of its institutions and the strengthening of its role through the support of the twelve member states. In the resolutions of national and inter-state conflicts, the UNASUR has played a positive role, since the solution of the conflicts was found through dialogue directed by the UNASUR between the states in conflict, as in the case of the Ecuadorian and Colombian diplomatic impasse. In summary, the UNASUR is on the way to catapulting itself into a position of being the main regional international institution of South America, binding the South American states politically and potentially economically. In addition, Brazil's strong engagement in global politics appears to have affected its leadership role in the South American region.

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