

Itamaraty on the Move: Institutional and Political Change in Brazilian Foreign Service under Lula da Silva's Presidency (2003–2010)

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This article aims to provide answers to two questions prompted by the latest reforms of Brazilian foreign service during Lula da Silva's presidency: How exactly might these institutional changes generate any impact over the Brazilian diplomatic corporation cohesion at large? How could bureaucratic insulation be undermined as an unexpected outcome of this process? To accomplish their objectives, the authors will briefly review the process of institution-building in Brazil, with an emphasis on the diplomatic corporation and the transformations it has undergone over the last three decades.

Keywords: Brazil, democracy, foreign policy, institutional politics, Itamaraty, reforms.

The harder one attempts to demonstrate that popular participation on Brazilian foreign policy-making has grown stronger, the more it becomes clear things have not changed much over time. A great deal of the literature points out that the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministério das Relações Exteriores) (MRE) remains strongly associated with a tradition of elitism, bureaucratic insulation and corporatism, and such tradition would forge among professional diplomats a sense of monopoly over what is understood as the *national interest*, which involves foreign policy formulation and implementation (Castro, 1983; Cheibub, 1985; Barros, 1986; Lima, 2000; Pinheiro, 2003; Faria, 2008). While such features have contributed to the establishment of a linear and consistent diplomatic tradition (Lafer, 2000), they have also spurred much criticism, particularly in regard to the ministry's averseness to institutional change and, above

all, to societal control or interference (Belém-Lopes, 2011). Nevertheless, under Lula da Silva's presidency some profound institutional changes, both at the levels of recruitment and formation, have been carried out in Itamaraty. Two questions immediately arise: How exactly might these changes have any impact over the Brazilian diplomatic corporation cohesion at large? How could bureaucratic insulation be undermined as an unexpected outcome of this process? To answer them, in the first section of this article we shall discuss the phenomenon of Itamaraty's bureaucratic insulation; in the second section we will identify and shed light on some of those recent changes to the institutional design with a view to debating its most likely consequences; next, we present and discuss research notes from the interviews conducted with Brazilian diplomats who entered the foreign service between 2005 and 2009, a time reforms were being implemented; finally, we offer our concluding remarks on the topic.

On the Bureaucratic Insulation of Itamaraty

One of the most important studies on the evolution and structure of the Brazilian diplomatic service was performed by Zairo Cheibub (1985). His main thesis is that diplomats, as a professional body, have grown stronger during the formation of the Brazilian state, which granted them significant control over foreign policy-making. They have acquired considerable autonomy 'both in relation to the social system as to the particular segments of the system and the state apparatus itself' (Cheibub, 1985: 114).

The strengthening of the diplomatic service has taken place in the broader context of the consolidation of Brazilian political institutions. However, whereas in almost all areas of the public service elites have not succeeded in reproducing themselves for the future (Barros, 1977), in the case of diplomats the mechanism of recruitment undertaken by politician, diplomat and statesman José Maria da Silva Paranhos Júnior (also known as 'Barão do Rio Branco', alluding to his social rank) has proved to be remarkably successful. As the Brazilian Foreign Minister from 1902 until his death in 1912, Rio Branco sought to equalise members of the service in terms of social origins and ideological bias, having favoured the creation of a relatively cohesive and homogeneous group that could ultimately rest on its feet. Not surprisingly, the 'Barão' is often acknowledged as one of the greatest institution-builders in Brazilian history (Lafer, 2000).

This double feature – institutional unity and ideological homogeneity – paved the way for a new republican diplomacy with the introduction of public examinations for the State Department in 1918 and the gradual departure from the highly centralised administration of Rio Branco (Cheibub, 1985: 120). It would take a few more decades, however, for the ministry to overcome the lack of greater institutionalisation – or professionalisation – of the early twentieth century. Until the advent of the Vargas era (1930–1945), Itamaraty was nothing more than a 'safe nest where the young men of the elite could be brought up' (Barros, 1986: 30). One could nonetheless point out a strong strand of continuity in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy, guided by the legacy and image of the Barão.

Brazilian diplomatic institutions would only take a more structured shape over the period Cheibub (1985) labels as 'bureaucratic-rational', which followed Rio Branco's 'charismatic moment'. Although 1918 was an important milestone because of the adoption of public examinations, the major administrative reforms happened in a period of intense bureaucratisation of the Brazilian state after 1930. The institutional

consolidation of the diplomatic service took place *pari passu* with the wider moves to modernise the state, whose biggest symbol is the establishment of a 'superministry', the Administrative Department of Public Service (DASP). Two institutional changes are worthy of mention: the Mello Franco reform (1931), which put the foreign services together, merging the State Department, Consular Service and Diplomatic Service, and the Oswaldo Aranha reform (1938), which concluded the unification and institutionalised these services (Castro, 1983). The founding of the Rio Branco Institute in 1945, with a view to ensuring a thorough diplomatic training for entrants, can be seen as an important contribution to the insulation of the foreign service. It became a unique, selective and professionally rigorous academy in the Brazilian civil service, comparable only to the Superior School of War for the military.

Even though the aforementioned reforms accounted for significant steps towards the institutionalisation of the diplomatic service, they did not foster substantial change for the internal cohesion of Itamaraty. On the contrary, they reinforced it, insofar as the dual function of training and socialisation of young candidates for Brazilian diplomacy was under full control of the chancellery itself. In fact, changes just *maintained* a certain share of the social elite at the top of foreign policy-making. This was reinforced by the entrance examination for the Rio Branco Institute, which seemed to be weighted in favour of the upper classes, particularly the children of diplomats, regardless of its overall high degree of difficulty (Barros, 1986).

In short, one can consider that the establishment of the Rio Branco Institute had two main consequences for the post-war Brazilian diplomacy. First, it increased the participation of diplomats – because it reduced the centrality of the role of the minister himself – in the formulation of foreign policy strategies. Second, it secured Itamaraty's bureaucratic insulation. Although external interference in the chancellery had never been significant, the closing of the MRE to outside influence did not acquire a strategic (and formal) character until the mid-twentieth century.

This institutional shielding makes Itamaraty peculiar in a number of respects. First of all, as already mentioned, it reinforces the *esprit de corps* of its members, a trait that has remained untouched over time. This has happened, it must be noted, despite the widening of the basis of selection and a career progression that is more dependent on merit. Arguably, the main distinction of the diplomatic service is in maintaining a structure that promotes, at the same time, very specialised training and socialisation on a constant basis. This structure is sustained through several courses, such as the Formation Course (regulated by Decree 336 of 30 May 2003), a Master's in Diplomacy (created and recognised by the Ministry of Education in 2002), the Course of Improvement of Diplomats (regulated by Decree 27 of 23 November 2000), which is a prerequisite for reaching the position of First Secretary, and the Course of Higher Studies (regulated in its current form in 1996, with amendments in 2003), a prerequisite for achieving the rank of Minister of Second Class. The completion of these courses has worked as a filter for the growing heterogeneity of diplomats and helped sustain the group spirit so central to the notion of an exceptional *ethos* (Barros, 1986).

The second consequence of bureaucratic insulation refers to the development of a professional sense of diplomatic activity, more substantive and comprehensive (Cheibub, 1985). Foreign trade, once performed by government agencies that were born of the administrative reforms of Vargas (such as the Brazilian Coffee Institute), gradually became integrated into the core of Itamaraty's interests. As a result, from the 1950s onwards, a generation of diplomats interested in economics came to life. They were able to consider Brazilian foreign policy in global terms, with considerable knowledge

of both politics and trade, and became progressively more active in the context of Presidents Quadros and Goulart's *independent foreign policy* (1961–1964).

The notion of a highly qualified diplomatic service, which relates to the 'bureaucratic insulation' of Itamaraty, has gained worldwide recognition with time. It was a common maxim among Brazil's neighbours, who wanted their foreign ministries to meet the same standards as those of the Brazilian diplomats, that 'el Itamaraty no improvisa' (Itamaraty does not improvise) (Barros, 1986: 29). Moreover, one should note the increasing presence of diplomats in other areas of public administration, occupying positions of first and second ranks in ministries and federal agencies, and playing a central role in the technocracy of the authoritarian regime (Pinheiro, 2000). In a way, this situation was made possible by the deep commitment of both the military and the diplomatic bureaucracy towards the *developmental state*. State-led macroeconomic policies, starting out with the import-substitution industrialisation, not only led to a solid national industry and to an economic boom in the late 1960s (the so-called 'Brazilian miracle'), but have also given rise to the concrete possibility that Brazil could become a great power. The corollary of Brazilian foreign policy during most of the military regime (1964–1985) was the idea of *Brasil Potência* (Brazil as a great power), which charmed generals, diplomats and politicians alike. At its heart are strategies laid out by Itamaraty, such as the universalism of bilateral partnerships, political pragmatism and multi-lateral activism, as well as the domestic and international credibility of Brazil's foreign service. Even after the return to democracy in the mid-1980s, it is noteworthy that two career diplomats have served as Ministers of Finance, the most important (and delicate) job of the Brazilian economy: Marcílio Moreira, between 1991 and 1992, and Rubens Ricupero, between March and September 1994.

Against all odds, the bureaucratic insulation enjoyed by Itamaraty was able to prevail – not without modifications – through the process of democratic transition. We understand that this characteristic was kept (almost) untouched for two main reasons. The first, and most obvious, concerns the lack of competition: the ministry maintained its central position as it found no external actors to systemically counterbalance its weight (Cheibub, 1989). Second, there is a set of institutional characteristics and historical developments of the Brazilian state, especially evident in the last couple of decades, which favours the centralisation of the process of foreign policy-making. They are: (a) the country's constitutional framework, which grants greater autonomy to the Executive in this matter, leaving the Legislative to a marginal position; (b) the fact that the Brazilian Congress permanently delegates to the Executive responsibility in matters relating to foreign policy; (c) the 'imperial' character of Brazilian presidentialism; (d) the fact that the development model of import substitution has generated introversion and isolation of political and economic processes, thus allowing for a controlled opening to international trade; (e) the largely adaptive and flexible character of Brazil's diplomatic service; and, last but not least, (f) the substantial and early professionalisation of Brazilian diplomats, associated with the prestige enjoyed by Itamaraty, both domestically and internationally (Faria, 2008).

The pluralisation of societal and bureaucratic agents with an interest and a stake in Brazil's international politics comes up, therefore, as the most sensitive exogenous movement against the alleged monopoly Itamaraty enjoys over foreign policy-making. It initially represented an inter-bureaucratic clash involving the chancellery and other ministries – in particular the Ministries of Finance and Planning – over the opening of new markets to Brazilian exports in the 1960s. Driven by the motto 'the best tradition of Itamaraty is to be able to renew itself', penned in a context of loss of prestige in public

opinion, the ministry established the Trade Promotion Department (Departamento de Promoção Comercial – DPC) in 1971. Under the direction of Paulo Flecha de Lima, it aimed to fill a gap that threatened the political monopoly of Itamaraty over trade policy, the strategic importance of which had become crucial to the military regime. Throughout Generals Geisel (1974–1979) and Figueiredo's (1979–1985) administrations, the DPC established itself as one of the axes of the third-world universalism of Brazilian foreign policy, irrespective of the interests of some military sectors (Barros, 1986: 33).

With the return to civilian rule in 1985, three types of actors with some degree of institutionalisation and increasingly interested in the outcomes of foreign policy have emerged: interest groups, particularly business elites and labour unions, and, at a slower pace, the organised civil society and political parties. Their influence on the formulation of foreign policy, although not quite linear, is twofold: on the one hand, it widened the channels of social participation in political issues as a byproduct of the democratic transition; on the other, especially due to the economic liberalisation of the early 1990s, the number of domestic stakeholders in international affairs rose sharply, most notably in the context of foreign trade. The presence of these actors, although in varying degrees, has contributed to the politicisation of foreign policy at large (Cason and Power, 2009).

Hence, it is possible to say that Brazil is undergoing a number of transformations with regard to the institutional dimension of its foreign policy: (a) growing pressure towards constitutional changes that would recover legislative activism in foreign policy-making, after a lifetime of delegation (Lima and Santos, 2001; Diniz and Ribeiro, 2008); (b) the intensification of presidential diplomacy (Cason and Power, 2009); (c) the overcoming of the import-substitution model of development, which has been replaced by a market-oriented one; (d) the expansion of the distributive and contentious nature of diplomatic activity in the country, and; finally; (e) the erosion of the otherwise unwavering cohesion of the diplomatic *corps*, especially under the Lula administration. On this last point, an increasing dissatisfaction among some segments of the diplomatic corps can be seen, especially retired ambassadors, who have not spared criticism of the way the government has conducted foreign-policy matters in academic articles and opinion editorials. In response to all these challenges, on its own initiative or constrained by a diversity of outside actors, Itamaraty has multiplied its efforts to adapt itself in order to promote dialogue beyond the gates of ministry. It has also carried out institutional reforms aimed at enlarging the background of the diplomats, which we will discuss next.

Recruitment, Training and Career: The Impact of Recent Institutional Changes

As we tried to show in the preceding section, Brazilian foreign policy has addressed some key domestic and international changes that have taken place over the last few decades. Besides opening up a road to dialogue with domestic agents, the post-authoritarian context has led the ministry, allegedly as a result of a need to fulfil the expectations that came with the democratic regime, to undertake institutional reforms. The reforms are somewhat dramatic if, on the one hand, they partially address the 'distributive dilemma' involved in broader popular participation and engagement in foreign policy issues, and, on the other, the very idea of diplomatic unity may be put in jeopardy. After all, they imply changes to the mechanisms of recruitment, promotion and evaluation of professional merit – and naturally trigger all sorts of reactions, from the most to the

least enthusiastic. Let us consider the following transformations, which encompass the rules of recruitment and career progression, and new channels of societal interaction:

1. The most notable changes in recruitment rules for career diplomats during the Lula da Silva era are: (a) the end of the eliminatory character of the English proficiency test in the Examination for Admission in the Diplomatic Career (Concurso de Admissão à Carreira Diplomática – CACD) in 2005; (b) the redesign of the CACD, including the preparation of an official suggested reading list for the exam, so as to avoid highly biased evaluations of candidates; (c) the removal of some selection criteria perceived as too subjective by the candidates (with the consequent replacement of the stage of personal interviews with more impersonal written tests); (d) an increase in the number of positions offered annually via public examination (approximately 400 vacancies provided between 2006 and 2010). As a consequence, (e) the number enrolled in the admission examination rose exponentially, from 2,556 in 1999 to 8,869 in 2010. There was also (f) an expansion in the number of cities in which the examination takes place – from 13 to 27.
2. Among the changes in the rules of career progression, we can refer to those specified in the provisions of Law 1440 of 29 December 2006; and Decree 6559 of 8 September 2008: (a) the counting of the time dedicated to studies in the Course of Preparation to the Diplomatic Service as ‘effective exercise of the Career’ for all purposes related to promotion and retirement; (b) the investiture to the position of Third Secretary on admittance to the career (i.e. approval in the examination and performing of initial duties); (c) greater emphasis on meritocracy, to the detriment of the criterion of seniority, and, consequently, (d) a potentially more rapid ascent to the rank of First-Class Minister.
3. Among the new channels for interaction with society are: (a) the availability of the Minister of Foreign Affairs’ schedule and appointments on the Internet; (b) the institutional presence of the MRE in social networks (YouTube, Facebook and Twitter); (c) the strengthening of the Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation as the official publishing house of the ministry, through which many international relations classics and books authored by diplomats are published; and (d) the sponsorship of cultural and academic meetings, and so on.

According to Carlos Faria (2008), two main features implied in such changes may weaken the traditional ethos associated with the diplomatic career. The first is the mass entry of diplomats in the Brazilian foreign service between 2006 and 2010, aimed at an increase of around 40 per cent in the number of active diplomats. In fact, Law 11292 (passed on 26 April 2006) created 400 lower-rank diplomatic posts, so that vacancies in the yearly admission exams were boosted from 30 to around 100 in the four-year expansion cycle (see Table 1).

Second, one must take note of the possibility of a faster career progression compared to the situation faced by those who entered under the old rules, and the considerably higher monthly wages paid to entrants as of 2005 when compared to previous decades (a real wage gain of approximately 200 per cent over the Lula da Silva administration). That makes career prospects much more appealing to people whose professional interests had never before been associated with diplomacy. Besides the apparently significant impact on group spirit that comes with such changes, one can reckon on the subsequent loss of organisational cohesion. This is mostly because of new and greater challenges

Table 1. Positions within the Brazilian Foreign Service

Title	Previous position No. of posts (Law 9.888, 8 December 1999)	New position No. of posts
First-class minister	98	122
Second-class minister	129	169
Counsellor	170	226
First Secretary	600	880
Second Secretary		
Third Secretary		
Total	997	1,397

Source: Presidência da República Casa Civil (2012).

for the socialisation of peers, resulting from the enlargement and diversification of the recruitment base. This is in addition to subjective aspects, such as prejudice that newcomers may encounter from colleagues for having entered the career through a public examination considered easy; or because some may have joined the diplomatic service under ‘affirmative action’ policies put into practice by the Brazilian government. Among these, quotas for self-declared African Brazilians, established by former foreign minister Celso Amorim in his very last days in office (to be applied as of 2011), may even give rise to silent and covert ways of segregation between ‘quota’ and ‘non-quota’ diplomats.

Nevertheless, that somewhat pessimistic prognosis on the fate of MRE organisational cohesion may be questioned. Given that the bureaucratic stratum is not impenetrable to the admission of new members – as distinct from the category of ‘caste’ as suggested by Raymundo Faoro (1958) – it might prove resilient and endure in time, adaptively remodelling to the newest political contingencies. The ministry, in this sense, could well take advantage of the absence of norms and control mechanisms of foreign policy-making to ultimately weaken the bargaining power of social forces, whose participation proved erratic over the years. This notion is shared by some Brazilian prominent scholars (Lima, 2000; Pinheiro, 2003), according to whom Itamaraty has managed to gain authority in the last couple of decades without, however, bearing the burden typical of democratic regimes – which could make foreign policy as subject to political and distributive conflicts as any other ‘regular’ public policy.

But the same lack of accountability and democratic responsiveness that shields the ministry against threats to its unity can also turn against it. The aforementioned institutional changes, be it in their qualitative or quantitative aspects, did not enjoy an affable response from career diplomats. This internal opposition to change denotes the survival of certain concepts and policy markers among members of the diplomatic corps. And judging by who cast the first stone, it is also possible to suggest Itamaraty is also suffering from some degree of political polarisation (from the inside), for many of the fiercest critics were important figures in the Cardoso administration, to which Lula and the Workers’ Party were opponents in the 1990s.

Former foreign minister Mario Gibson Barboza, who served as foreign minister from 1969 to 1974, voiced his distress as soon as these changes began to take shape. On the suppression of the eliminatory character of the English test in CACD, he proclaimed: ‘Brazil has, unfortunately, a vast number of illiterates. It does not seem appropriate to

me, however, to open the doors of our diplomatic career to illiteracy' (Barboza, 2005: A2). Former foreign minister Luiz Felipe Lampreia, in charge of Cardoso's foreign policy from 1995 to 2001, joined the chorus in no time: 'English is to diplomacy what mathematics is to engineering' (quoted in Ribeiro, 2005). Another top figure who reacted adamantly against the new place English had in the CACD admission exams was the experienced ambassador Paulo Flecha de Lima, to whom 'the bet on the mediocrity of the diplomatic staff is a wrong one, for that will stunt us in terms of external performance' (Flecha de Lima, 2005). In a more passionate way, Ambassador Rubens Barbosa called the change in English language requirements a 'blooper that scratches the image of the institution' (Barbosa, 2006), calling for a fast solution – that never actually came.

With regard to the expansion of diplomatic staff, minister Barboza (2008: 172) called the 'absurd and unnecessary creation of new 400 positions of diplomats' a 'coup'. Former ambassador to the United States Rubens Barbosa mentioned that this reform was undertaken 'according to the outmoded idea that organisational problems are solved through the continued expansion of means' (Barbosa, 2006). Some years later, he would add that the most recent change, the adoption of quotas for the African Brazilians, was also a mistake to the extent that 'the quota system is a copy of the United States's, where there is a clear racial divide', unlike Brazil (quoted in Maltchik, 2010). Finally, the retired ambassador Marcio Dias has expressed, more generally, but also incisively, his discontent with the new management direction in the House of Rio Branco: 'it is hard to swallow quietly the series of administrative "practical jokes" [sic] that have been pulled. And that already started with the lack of legitimacy of the Secretary General, who did not meet the legal requirements for the position' (Dias, 2007: A11). He was referring to a decree President Lula passed in order to rule out the requirement that the Secretary General had to have served as Chief of Mission abroad, allowing for the appointment of Ambassador Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães, the former director of Itamaraty's Research Institute of International Relations (Instituto de Pesquisa de Relações Internacionais), as early as 2003.

Changes in the View of 'Young Diplomats'

The impact of such institutional changes has not yet undergone a more systematic empirical assessment. At first glance, we may assert that such changes sought to boost the ministry's institutional capacities and to promote its administrative modernisation. The strategy was twofold: to assure a more diverse ethnic and social background to the diplomatic body, as well as to enhance its ability to sustain the ever-growing presence and activism of Brazil's foreign relations. On the other hand, as already discussed, it also seems that some of these changes could weaken the *esprit de corps* of the ministry – and, indirectly, its capacity to maintain its autonomy of action.

In order to test the plausibility of this hypothesis, we have conducted fieldwork and interviewed some 'young diplomats' on the possible impact of the changes carried out in Itamaraty. A questionnaire was sent in June 2010 (by email) to 38 diplomats who joined the Formation Course at Instituto Rio Branco between 2005 and 2009. It contained ten questions encompassing the Admission Exam, the enlargement of the diplomatic corps and its impact on the diplomatic career and on institutional cohesion, and also requested an assessment of the bureaucratic insulation and of the criticism of the alleged partisan or ideological foreign policy of Lula da Silva's administration. Given the sensitivity of

the issues at stake and the deeply rooted tradition of opaqueness in all that concerns Itamaraty, we decided to forward the questionnaire only to diplomats who were at least acquaintances of the authors. This strategy would presumably yield greater openness in data collection and grant access to personal positions and thoughts we otherwise would hardly be able to obtain. Nevertheless, the sample was not as robust as we thought at first: only 15 out of 38 (39.5 per cent of all questionnaires sent) were completed and returned. Despite having acknowledged this, we assume the data collected to be appropriate and sound from a methodological standpoint, as the materials received were of great relevance to our points, airing new interpretive paths, and, even more importantly, providing plausible and interesting answers to the questions we raised at the beginning of this article. Interviews we have conducted for this research were not intended to be representative in any sense of a consistent trend within the field of diplomatic and/or Brazilian studies. However, they indeed played a fundamental role in allowing for some of our conclusions. As one can work out, the difficulty in getting responses from Brazilian diplomats is in itself allegedly implicit in the kind of research object we are dealing with in this article.

When questioned about the possibility that changes in the Admission Exam have led to the 'diversification of Instituto Rio Branco's recruitment base', the majority of the interviewed diplomats answered positively. They indeed recognised the efforts at Itamaraty to make the diplomatic career more democratic; however, many respondents emphasised that, in their view, the career would be an *elitist* one, having witnessed geographical and perhaps academic, but not socio-economic diversification – despite the fact that affirmative action policies are showing their first results, as they also pointed out. One of the reasons why elitism is still a reality, according to one young diplomat, is the fact that the 'preparation for the exam is as expensive as before, or even more expensive'. In the words of another respondent, which echoes the general perception of the interviewees that the exam is still very difficult to pass, 'there is some hysteria that changes made the exam duller, which is not true'. The respondent goes on to say that what may have changed is the 'perception that it is not anymore necessary to have these aristocratic origins to become a diplomat', that is, 'not being necessary to be fluent in several foreign languages right from the start or be a *connoisseur* of classical ballet to be approved'. Intellectual challenges, not social or cultural ones, would have to be overcome in this new reality.

On the other hand, one cannot deny that there has been some degree of diversification within the diplomatic corps. Besides changes in admission procedures, among the factors that must be taken into account, in the view of some respondents, are the significant salary increase, especially for lower ranks; the renewed value of public service in Brazil; the general advances in education; the greater visibility of the diplomatic career and of foreign policy; and the growing internationalisation of Brazilian society. All these factors have become particularly prominent in the last decade, which mostly coincides with the Lula da Silva administration. In the long run, this might lead to the replacement of diplomacy as a *vocation* with diplomacy as a *profession*, as one young diplomat underlines. Changes in the mentality must, of course, ignore or downplay the role of socialisation within the Ministry. Nevertheless, the respondent insists that actual diplomats enter the career with a very different background than that of their superiors. Back then, it was absolutely essential that one had a vocation to be a diplomat, for he/she entered the diplomatic academy without being granted the condition of diplomats and, therefore, had no salary, just a poor scholarship'. The respondent concludes that:

this, in the long run, is fundamentally opposite to the idea that Itamaraty, as a state career, is 'the military in suits'. While it boosts the level of professionalisation in the Ministry, it also erodes from the bottom the rather archaic and still present structures that set out hierarchy for its own sake, disconnected from responsibilities and functions of those heads of divisions. Today's entrants are experienced in the private sector [...] and are utterly familiar with the interconnected world of these days. This will engender a clash of generations [...].

When asked about the 'necessity of expanding the number of foreign servants', respondents unanimously pointed out its pertinence, relevance and opportunity. The reasons given were basically the same for the government and for the MRE: the fact that, comparatively, the Brazilian diplomatic corps is rather small; the need for professionals to fill up new posts in the recently-opened representations overseas, as well as in the ministry; and the fact that the country is 'rapidly raising its international profile'. Still, one of the respondents emphasised that there is also need to 'make better use of the existing diplomats' and a 'better division of tasks between diplomats, chancellery officials and chancellery assistants'. Another young diplomat affirmed that the expansion 'seems to have been done without any further preoccupation with the way these new diplomats would be incorporated in the career'. When it comes to the intra-organisational effects of the expansion of foreign service, the questionnaire asked respondents to assess its impacts over the Formation Course dynamics. They replied, almost unanimously, that the course has not undergone adequate adaptation (although changes were actually made, such as in enlarging the number of optional courses or in establishing different levels of language instruction). In this sense, the longer internship period (to the detriment of the time allotted to classes) instituted by the new rules would have been result, according to a respondent, of 'a great necessity for the MRE to rapidly employ the human resources available'.

The overall results are judged in different ways. If the impact is negligible to many, in the view of others, crucial transformations would ensue. One respondent stated that 'bigger classes may dilute the sense of competition among classmates and expose newcomers to a wide array of talents, life experiences, and human contacts. The time at Rio Branco Institute has a greater value as it provides a place for socialisation among young diplomats than as an instance of professional qualification or academic development in itself.' In the view of another respondent, 'from a psychosocial standpoint (which is the most important one), classes of a hundred diplomats certainly have less cohesion than smaller ones; however, this loss of unity is counterbalanced by gains in diversity.'

The questionnaire also posed the question of whether the enlargement of the diplomatic cadre is affecting the work environment and procedures in Itamaraty. Many respondents made explicit that, because of the 'conservative character' of the House of Rio Branco, it is too soon to assess the impacts of such intra-organisational changes. Yet the young diplomats seem to have divergent opinions about what comes next. Some point out that, because of the weight of hierarchy and previously established organisational routines, impacts will be limited to form, while substance will remain untouched. Changes are 'breaking down hierarchy, formality, the unwritten rules. It removes the focus from the personal life of each person, which is quite strong in the Ministry.' According to another respondent, 'there are more people to live up to the broadening of the agenda of the MRE, people with more professional experience

outside Itamaraty, and that may change its work culture'. To others, there are some potentially decisive disruptions in motion. 'There is no longer a *career track* of success or failure', one young diplomat states. 'It is starting to renew the environment, with the rapid inclusion of contemporary viewpoints and a greater diversity of classes, regions, academic backgrounds, and so forth. The most profound change, however, will take place when these newcomers assume positions of command', as indicated by another respondent. In sum, a third diplomat points out that 'to some extent, we may notice the replacement of a "career" perspective for a "job" one'.

When questioned about the way older servants have reacted to new and considerably larger classes at Rio Branco Institute, most respondents detected some form of opposition. Some have downplayed the impacts of such resistance. According to a newcomer, 'in my view, the majority [of older diplomats] understands the need for larger groups, and given the level of overload in which some divisions work, they receive these new diplomats with open arms'. Others posit that changes are usually unwelcome at Itamaraty: one diplomat writes that 'there is indeed some aversion to the way the selection of diplomats is made – a bit of disdain for the classes of 100, especially from those who are at a more advanced stage in the career'. A third group believes that opposition to entrants is widespread. In the words of one diplomat:

there are all kinds of reactions. The older ones seem to perceive the expansion as the belittlement of the imperial house of which they were part one day. The current bosses, who have benefitted from the availability of new servants, seem to judge their young mates on an individual basis. And there are those from classes immediately prior to the large ones, who feel harmed for having been submitted to more difficult circumstances.

The issue of career progression mechanisms was also subject to polemic in recent years. It resonated not only among diplomats, but also in the mass media. It is worth mentioning an apocryphal document entitled 'War and Peace at Itamaraty' that became public early in 2007. It was allegedly written by senior diplomats, both at home and abroad, who were said to be shocked at the new promotion guidelines established by the ministry. The rules, they said, favoured diplomats who had not served abroad, who could simply 'cut' the line of hierarchy to the detriment of more experienced Second Secretaries. As a result of its sheer lack of transparency, the document went on, the decision caused animosity among colleagues, widespread frustration and even revanchist sentiments, 'making daily life unbearable at Itamaraty'. The authors concluded that rules must change so that unity among diplomats is preserved above all. When asked about why there was 'so much polemic' around the new rules, the respondents clearly diverged. Answers ranged from complete denial to open criticism of the mechanisms of career progression, with many other attempts to justify such changes. To some, the quarrel over promotion criteria is not new, for the diplomatic career has always been a competitive one. To others, meritocracy has rarely defined who would get promotion at Itamaraty. 'In the best Brazilian style, those who follow the rules only do so because they "have no friends" to make the relevant political appointments so they can reach better positions. The general rule is that the personal lobby is much more effective than just merits or seniority.' According to another respondent, 'what happens today is a strategy to stimulate diplomats to serve in strategic posts. And, naturally, one of the main incentives is promotion. Diplomats of many classes have been systematically promoted for having served in posts outside the Elizabeth Arden circuit.'

It also comes as no surprise that our respondents disagree over the possibilities that these changes undermine the cohesion of the diplomatic corps. Most answers pointed out low risks, or no risks whatsoever. One young diplomat stated that ‘institutional mechanisms are already efficient enough: Rio Branco, dress code, diplomatic language. Diplomats are a tribe and recognise themselves as such.’ Another said that ‘things may loosen up, but corporate brainwash will never allow [loss of cohesion] to take place’. A few respondents, on the other hand, do foresee some risks. ‘A phenomenon that may follow such “loss of cohesion”, which I would call “loss of corporatism”, is the consciousness that Itamaraty needs to work in more coordination with other ministries.’ Finally, some would go so far as to say that ‘such “cohesion” has never existed, [for] there have always been cleavages of different kinds inside Itamaraty’.

In general terms, however, cohesion should not be understood as an absence of divisions within the ministry. Such groups, according to the respondents, have always existed. ‘In terms of political ideologies, there are people from all imaginable points in the spectrum’, underlined one respondent. According to another young diplomat, ‘the main division takes place along the traditional left–right line, which means that there are those who would rather see Brazil’s international relations in the light of a more prominent liberalism, which would help establish Brazil as part of the West, and there are those who support a traditional left-wing Latin-Americanism/anti-Americanism, and also a big and powerful state to promote national development’. Nevertheless, it does not mean there is room for debate. A third respondent emphasises that the exchange of ideas, in this sense, is minimal: ‘the career is still quite hierarchical. Decisions are only made at the very top. But I do not notice any sort of persecution due to the fact that one or another disagrees over how foreign policy is conducted. The biggest problem would be the public expression of divergent opinions.’

Institutional changes alone, however, do not seem to be the only hindrance against the *esprit de corps* of the ministry. Foreign policy options may also weaken the so-called ‘permanent consensus’ (Ricupero, 2001) that has characterised Brazilian diplomacy since the beginning of the New Republic. That is why we asked our respondents to comment on ‘the widespread criticism of an alleged “ideologisation” of Brazilian foreign policy’. The general reaction was to deny the validity of such criticism. One young diplomat called it a ‘nonsense’, adding that:

the Brazilian diplomacy is proud of its historical pragmatism and its commitment to the Brazilian state, not with governments. Few were the times in our history in which our diplomacy acted in an explicitly ideological manner. The Brazilian diplomacy is currently spearheaded by a career diplomat and, for the first time ever, there are career diplomats in charge of all posts abroad. [Itamaraty] understands its technical nature and is averse to external interference.

Some said critics were unfounded mostly because the alleged ‘politicisation’ expresses the obvious condition under democracy. ‘It is natural that any given state’s foreign policy responds to a set of values and ideas of the incumbent administration. That is exactly what happens today, but this is not a new phenomenon. Itamaraty has never been disconnected from the *Palácio do Planalto*’, one respondent affirmed. According to a colleague, ‘such critics come from sectors that do not live the reality of Itamaraty. First and foremost because there have always been preferences, secondly because there is no such thing as ideologisation. There is no automatic alignment or anything like that. What exists is the diagnosis that Brazil needs to gain space in global decision-making forums.’

Two respondents even criticised the critics, attributing to them some underlying political bias. In the view of one respondent, 'external criticism, widespread in the media, often serves specific electoral interests'. To another diplomat, 'such criticism comes from those who, for eight years [under Cardoso's presidency], also made foreign policy ideological and partisan – from the other side. There is hypocrisy in these critics, which are not always concealed, and which are many times followed by true intellectual dishonesty.' The interesting element of these judgements is that many young diplomats did not make a distinction between the 'ideologisation' of foreign policy and within Itamaraty. This is meaningful because, even if they correctly pointed out that foreign policy invariably belongs to the state and to the current administration, diplomacy is seen as a *synonym* of foreign policy, not as its *instrument*.

Finally, respondents were requested to position themselves 'before the also recurring criticism against the assumed insulation of the foreign service'. Much like with other questions, the authors received a vast array of answers. Some supported the critics by saying that the insulation is detrimental: 'Itamaraty is a black box, no doubt about it. This is partly due to the competence of the Ministry in exercising its functions (arrogantly, as some other public servants would say). But such insulation leads to endogeny, and hence to the inability to self-criticism, to a self-laudatory behaviour, and to a narrow-minded conservatism.' Other respondents admit the critics as partially correct, but point out that things are changing rapidly in Itamaraty. To one of them, 'there still lacks a greater sectorial participation in internal decision-making. But I understand this is a process already on the move and which is showing results'. In the words of another diplomat, 'I believe that, owing to an intense movement of democratisation in the Brazilian government, which does not include only Itamaraty, the Ministry establishes more contact with the civil society and the press than ever before.' To a third respondent, 'with the rise in the average age of diplomats and in their number, such insulation tends to disappear. First, because the conscience that diplomats are part of a much wider body grows; secondly, many people are arriving [at Itamaraty] having worked in other ministries, which makes dialogue easier.'

One of the young diplomats in our sample adopted a different stance and was in support of the status quo: 'Some degree of insulation is a good thing. It comes as no surprise that Itamaraty is often compared to the military service. These are state careers, and some shielding is important. Compare, for example, with the case of the San Martín in Argentina, where councillors are appointed politically. It voids the career.' We must note, as a final comment, that few of the respondents referred to insulation in its double dimension: in the intra-governmental sphere and in what comes from the interactions between Itamaraty and the society.

Conclusion

With regard to the questions we raised about institutional cohesion in the introduction to this article, it is arguable that Itamaraty might be on the verge of a historical breakthrough. *First of all*, because its newest 500 recruits seem not to be driven by an inscrutable good-old-time 'ethos' or sense of belonging to a 'caste' – as used to be the case in the 1800s and early 1900s – but instead abide by the rules and procedures that apply to regular public servants in Brazil today. *Second*, because those institutional reforms embraced by president Lula during his two terms (2003–2010) will possibly bring about deep changes to how the Brazilian foreign service formulates and implements

the so-called ‘national interest’ in the long run, both in terms of form and substance. It remains, of course, a speculation for now. But chances are that the reforms may resonate and deliver some unthinkable consequences over the coming generations. In any case, their effects can only be fully assessed by the time this breeding of hundreds of diplomats – some of whom we have interviewed for this research – matures, as they finally reach the upper ranks of Itamaraty. *Third*, when it comes to intra-organisational changes, one can assuredly forecast hierarchy will lose part of its grip as an atavistic ordering principle of the ‘House of Rio Branco’, to the extent that youngsters feel the need to create a new professional environment in which they fulfil their career aspirations. In the words of one of our interviewees, the Brazilian foreign service seems to be ‘on the move’ as yet. In all likelihood, this process will still take a few decades to come full circle.

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