

# MEDIA AND FOREIGN POLICY IN LULA'S BRAZIL

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## *Introduction*

The interaction between the mass media and foreign policy in Brazil has always been a delicate one, slight at most times, but never meaningless. It has become commonplace to say that, due to the virtual monopoly the Brazilian Foreign Ministry (Itamaraty) has enjoyed over foreign policymaking from the early days of its most important chancellor, Barão do Rio Branco (1902-1912), public debate on the country's goals and strategies has never really taken place (CHEIBUB, 1985; LIMA, 2000; FARIA, 2008). Instead, diplomacy has been by far one of the most undisputed public issues throughout the twentieth century, having survived two long authoritarian periods and several political upheavals. When the first civil president was elected in early 1985, after two decades of military regime, he is said to have decided to keep foreign policy untouched for it represented a supra-partisan consensus that had successfully pushed development forward (RICUPERO, 2001).

Only recently have some studies unveiled the role of public opinion and the mass media in times when foreign policy goals were subject to controversy (MANZUR, 1999; 2009; FRANCO, 2009; FERREIRA, 2009). What these works suggest is that public debate over foreign policy goals grows more intense as polarization within Itamaraty becomes salient. Although such relationship seems quite obvious at first, it is not that much straightforward for two reasons.

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First, the strong *esprit de corps* that marks Brazil's diplomatic service does not allow for open disagreements within the Foreign Ministry to reach public knowledge (CHEIBUB, 1985; BARROS, 1986). That is why identifying different groups and ideological strands among diplomats has always been a daunting task, having only recently received systematic academic scrutiny (SARAIVA, 2010; CASARÕES, 2012). In any case, we may consider that polarization – in the sense that these ideologically-divergent groups come into being and eventually coexist – is much more recurrent than the debate itself.

Second, such debate is not genuinely public. When it takes place, it is carried out through the hands of politicians (who have attacked, sometimes fiercely, the nationalist stances of Getúlio Vargas and João Goulart) or the diplomats themselves (as in the case of Ambassador Roberto Campos against the main lines of Figueiredo's third-world diplomacy in the early 1980s). Scholars, businesspeople, or journalists have usually been on the fringes of this discussion, which had in the newspapers and magazines its most active battlefield. Strictly speaking, however, it hardly reached the general audience, insofar as foreign policy did not involve direct distributive issues or have any political or electoral appeal.

It is fair to assume that the 1990s represented a turning point in the relationship between the mass media, public opinion, and foreign policy. The new democratic background, consolidated by the Constitution of October 1988, has progressively increased the involvement of an ever more active civil society in foreign affairs. Economic liberalization measures, undertaken by presidents Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso in the wake of that decade, helped increase the distributive character of foreign policy. When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office in January 2003, he decided to make Brazil's external relations both an instrument for development and a source of prestige – at home and abroad. Never before had foreign policy been so close to the daily life of the citizens. It has also turned into a source of discontent (and opportunity) for the opposition to Lula's administration. From retired ambassadors to renowned scholars, from politicians to journalists, critics often appeared on the pages of newspapers and magazines, in articles and op-eds, underscoring the government's gaffes and misdeeds in foreign affairs.

This article looks at this new relationship, in the light of two concurrent trends: the pluralization of actors with stakes in foreign policy; and an active

presidential diplomacy (CASON; POWER, 2009). We argue that, more than just a battlefield of ideas, Brazil's most prominent media vehicles have played an active role against Lula's foreign policy, although they had but a limited agenda-setting capacity. To this end, the text will be divided in four sections. The first one deals with the recent developments of foreign policymaking in Brazil, and seeks to understand how the introduction of new actors and institutions has affected the political balance behind the country's external relations. The second provides an overview of Lula's foreign policy strategies and their relationship with presidential diplomacy. The third offers some data on the behavior of two selected newspapers, *Folha de São Paulo* (FSP) and *O Estado de São Paulo* (OESP), on foreign policy issues. The third and final section compares media reactions to Brazil's relations with the United States, most specifically regarding negotiations on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and to some aspects of Brazilian South-South cooperation, and discusses the most relevant results.

### **Contemporary trends in Brazilian foreign policy: pluralization and presidentialization**

Brazil is, in hindsight, one of the late twentieth-century middle-powers that have shown a great deal of continuity in its foreign relations. This is true at least for the period from 1930 through 1990, when the country ostensibly used its foreign policy with a view to attaining national development goals (LIMA, 1994; CERVO; BUENO, 2002). Strategies of development have surely varied, oscillating between a pro-U.S., foreign capital-dependent as in the governments of Eurico Dutra (1946-1950) or Castello Branco (1964-1967), and a third-worldist, nationalist model as in the 'independent foreign policy' of Jânio Quadros and João Goulart or the 'responsible pragmatism' of Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979). However, the intimate relationship between the developmentalist state and its foreign strategies has been relatively constant over the years.

The country's diplomatic values, principles, and methods have also stayed very much the same. This is due to the strong legacy of Barão do Rio Branco, who is said to have introduced a diplomacy based on the rule of law, the utmost respect for national sovereignty, the pacific settlement of disputes, and multilateralism – known in his days as 'parliamentary diplomacy'

(LAFER, 2001). The sense of corporate unity built by Rio Branco during his decade-long tenure as foreign minister, and the myth around his image that has emerged after his death, have contributed to what is known as one of the most stable and coherent institutions in Brazilian politics, and one of the most well acknowledged diplomatic services to date (CHEIBUB, 1985; BARROS, 1986).

Despite the longevity of values, methods, and goals, Brazilian foreign policy has undergone major changes since the beginning of the *Nova República* in the mid-1980s. These changes became more evident throughout the following decade, with severe impacts on foreign policymaking both at the level of formulation and implementation. In this sense, the democratic opening that has characterized Brazil's new political moment had two important outcomes: first, it has created demands for transparency and accountability that could undermine Itamaraty's 'bureaucratic insulation' (and therefore its monopoly over foreign affairs) in the long run. After all, the very excellence of the nation's diplomacy rested on a considerable degree of elitism and closeness. Secondly, it has paved the ground for the emergence of new actors within the civil society that had some interest in international affairs, from labor unions to human rights activists to businesspeople, which also put pressure on the Foreign Ministry (FARIA, 2008).

Trade liberalization has also changed how foreign policy was made, and who made it. The centrality of trade to the country's diplomatic activities had already been acknowledged in the early 1970, when the Department for Trade Promotion was created as a core branch of the ministry (BARROS, 1986). Nevertheless, only with the economic opening promoted by the 'neoliberal' presidents Collor de Mello and Cardoso did foreign policy turn into a genuinely distributive issue. Some key business sectors (such as computers or automotives), whose competitiveness were otherwise assured by the government, had to come to terms with trends such as globalization and regional integration (KINGSTONE, 1999). The more issues such as trade regulation and tariffs reform became salient, the greater the engagement of other federal agencies, such as the Ministry of Economy (CASTELAN, 2010), and of private actors in trade policies (MANCUSO; OLIVEIRA, 2006).

In sum, the rise of democracy and market-oriented policies in Brazil has impacted on foreign policymaking in two ways. The first and most important one is the *pluralization of actors* who had a stake in diplomatic affairs. From a

societal standpoint, labor unions were particularly concerned with the development of regional integration, and made an effort to intervene in negotiations on the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) and on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) (VIGEVANI; MARIANO, 2005). Businesspeople shared similar concerns, especially when competitiveness was at risk. The automotive sector, for example, pushed Brazil towards trade disputes with the Argentine industry and with developed countries at the World Trade Organization (WTO) (VEIGA, 2005). Political parties, on their part, started trying to reap the electoral potential of foreign policy issues as trade liberalization became a centerpiece of the political agenda (OLIVEIRA; ONUKI, 2010). Finally, a number of non-governmental organizations could voice their demands in areas in which Brazil got progressively involved, such as environmental protection (LAGO, 2006) and human rights (HADDAD, 2005).

All these actors have, to a greater or lesser extent, enough political clout to set the agenda in their respective areas of interest, or at least to tip the balance to their favor. There are other agents, however, who do not have agenda-setting powers, be it due to the lack of political leverage, or simply because their stakes are low. The academic community and the mass media usually fall in this category. Although they are important sources of ideas and the quintessential venues for public debate, their relationship with Itamaraty is often thin, and at most times peripheral (FONSECA JUNIOR, 2011). Why, then, has the role of the mass media changed in recent years?

That is why we must understand the second trend of contemporary Brazilian foreign policy, *presidentialization*. Presidential diplomacy is usually identified with strong chiefs of executive, as in the postwar United States or in the French Fourth Republic. It has become a reality in Brazil in the late 1980s, when the country's foreign credibility was painfully at stake and regional integration was on the move (MALAMUD, 2005), and grew more intense in the Cardoso and Lula years (CASON;POWER, 2009). This is also due to the rise of multilateralism and, following its course, the advent of the so-called 'summit diplomacy' (DANESE, 1999), in which Brazil has intensely taken part. This new diplomatic reality, in which presidents are active international stakeholders and multilateral summits take place quite often, has also changed the relationship between public opinion, the mass media, and foreign policy. As

long as foreign policy is closely associated with the president, his acts abroad naturally receive more media attention, and diplomacy is forced to become more accountable, which also contributes to the politicization of international affairs. This seems to be precisely the case of Lula's Brazil, which we will explore next.

### **Lula's foreign policy strategies and the role of a charismatic leader**

When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva won the presidential race in November 2002, many sectors of the Brazilian society held their breath. Regardless of the promises Lula had made (as a candidate) in order to assure citizens, elites, and foreign markets that no economic or political rollback would take place, some still doubted that a former metal worker and union leader and his Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) could keep the nation on track. After all, many expected an unprepared president leading an ideological government (VIZENTINI, 2011) in difficult times – at home and abroad.

The greatest challenge the recently-elected President Lula had to overcome was economic rather than political. In order to live up to his promises – most of them vowed in his 'Letter to the Brazilian People', issued in early 2002 – he decided to embrace economic orthodoxy. By pushing interest rates to the sky, the government wanted to bring inflation down and stop currency devaluation (COUTO; BAIA, 2004). It further deepened the recession for some time, and growth rates would only recover by Lula's second year in office. Yet, such moves allowed the President to gradually gain confidence among middle-class citizens, businesspeople, and foreign markets.

Orthodox measures, however, came with a price. Many in his own party (and among his most loyal supporters, intellectuals and workers alike) dismissed what they called the 'triumph of neoliberal hegemony' (BOITO JR., 2003). This is probably why Lula decided to make a turn to the left in two key areas of policymaking: social programs (with the launch of the *Fome Zero* and *Bolsa Família* programs in 2003) and foreign policy. With respect to the latter, Almeida (2004: 162) underlines that diplomacy is 'the strand of government activity that most resembles the old proposals and the traditional guidelines of the Workers' Party' at the outset of Lula's first term. Moreover, 'the inclusion of the social agenda as a major topic of foreign affairs' was an important

innovation that also reflected this unique political approach (LIMA; HIRST, 2006).

‘Change’ was, in fact, an idea that has characterized the new administration’s foreign policy since the 2002 elections (VIGEVANI; CEPALUNI, 2007). Among the proposals outlined in Lula’s electoral platform were ‘the defense of national sovereignty’, ‘the struggle for a radically different world order’, ‘cooperation with emerging powers, such as China, India, and South Africa’, ‘the strengthening of Mercosur’, and ‘the rejection of the FTAA proposal as it is’ (FORTES, 2011). Although some of the principles that guided President Lula’s international relations had already been evoked by his predecessor a couple of years before, they assumed a new face under the Workers’ Party government, with a distinct conceptual emphasis (ALMEIDA, 2004). In fact, Foreign Minister Celso Amorim made an effort to draw a line between Cardoso’s foreign policy and his government’s own, stressing rupture rather than continuity, as stated in his inauguration speech: ‘we have to take this posture of responsible and confident activism to foreign relations. *We will not shy away from an engaged protagonism, whenever there is need to defend the national interest and the values that inspire us*’ (AMORIM, 2011: 14, emphasis added).

In sum, we may posit that Lula’s foreign policy guidelines, while maintaining many of the principles of Cardoso’s diplomacy (such as the quest for autonomy in foreign policymaking, the need for regional integration, and the defense of democracy in South America), went beyond the desire to make Brazil a ‘global trader’. The new government’s aspiration was to drive the country towards a more prominent international role, so that it could become a ‘global player’ in world affairs. To achieve this, President Lula adopted a strategy of ‘autonomy through diversification’, by which the country would adhere to ‘international norms and principles by means of South-South alliances, including regional alliances, and through agreements with non-traditional partners (China, Asia-Pacific, Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East, etc), trying to reduce asymmetries in external relations with powerful countries’ (VIGEVANI; CEPALUNI, 2007: 1313). Attaining a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council was, of course, an inseparable part of this strategy (HIRST; LIMA; PINHEIRO, 2010).

'Autonomy through diversification' did not exclude the foreign strategy that had prevailed over the previous decade, 'autonomy through participation', which was oriented by values and towards the participation in international (liberal) regimes (cf. VIGEVANI; OLIVEIRA; CINTRA, 2003). The predominantly 'grotian' approach to world politics (PINHEIRO, 2000), however, was replaced by a more 'realist' one, in which Western and liberal values played a minor part and that gave way to economic and political pragmatism. Such realism could be observed in a number of situations over the course of the Lula administration: the establishment of alliances in the developing world, especially with intermediate powers, such as the IBSA Forum (OLIVEIRA; ONUKI; OLIVEIRA, 2006; VIEIRA; ALDEN, 2011); the trade G20 at the Doha Round of the WTO (VISENTINI, 2005; CARVALHO, 2010) or the BRICS initiative (FLEMES, 2010); the country's bid for regional leadership in South America (MALAMUD, 2011); and the strategic relationship with developed nations, most notably with the United States (PECEQUILO, 2010).

While these strategies have achieved different degrees of success, all can be understood as attempts at affirming Brazil's power abroad and garnering global recognition. Furthermore, they have combined an intense diplomatic work with the charismatic image of President Lula (and, to a lesser extent, of foreign minister Amorim). Ricupero (2010) has appropriately called Lula da Silva's foreign policy a 'personal and nontransferable' one, stressing that most of its achievements rested on the president's magnetism and political skills. Likewise, he was charged for the diplomatic mistakes or failures that might have taken place. That is why most attacks against Brazilian international relations over the Lula years were not always directed to Itamaraty, but to the president himself, and to individuals and groups whose positions were associated to him – such as Marco Aurélio Garcia, Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães, and the ones in the foreign service who identified themselves with nationalist policies, to the detriment of liberal-internationalist ones (SARAIVA, 2010). The case of *Folha* and *Estado* seem of particular interest and will be explored in the following section.



### **The role of the print vehicles: how did they change with respect to foreign policy?**

Up until the early 2000s, the mass media had been but a ‘minor actor’ in foreign policy issues. They had rarely shown an agenda of their own. At best, what they did was to provide a platform for individual actors, such as politicians, business leaders, or even diplomats to express their opinions on specific events or decisions involving the diplomatic service. Editorial lines of newspapers, regardless of their alignment with (or sympathy towards) political ideologies or specific governments, usually gave little attention to foreign policy.

Let us consider two of the most important newspapers in Brazil, *Folha de São Paulo* and *O Estado de São Paulo*. They have consistently ranked among the country’s five most circulated newspapers, with a nationwide average 250,000 daily copies for *Estado* and 300,000 for *Folha* (ASSOCIAÇÃO NACIONAL DE JORNAIS, 2012)<sup>2</sup>. As Vieira de Jesus (2009) points out, *Folha de São Paulo* – the country’s most read newspaper in the last two decades – was probably the first to systematically voice its interests in the outcomes of foreign policy<sup>3</sup>. During the second term of the Cardoso administration, for example, most editorials accused the government of not advancing a genuinely ‘national’ interest in the negotiations of the FTAA and Mercosur. They also criticized the liberal stance of the government, which had failed to defend the interests of the country’s industry at the WTO and had deepened Brazil’s external dependency (VIEIRA DE JESUS, 2009). As a matter of fact, out of the 63 editorials published by *Folha* on foreign policy issues between 1999 and 2002, half of them (32) contained some degree of outright criticism, whereas only 5 (7.9%) were openly favorable to the government’s diplomacy<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Rio de Janeiro’s most popular daily, *O Globo*, has frequently ranked in second among the most circulated newspapers. Although we have collected many of its editorials and op-eds, due to the lack of a digital database or an accurate search engine, data was not as robust as for the other newspapers. That is the only reason why we chose not to use *O Globo* in this discussion, albeit acknowledging the importance of the newspaper and the eventual distortions such ‘selection bias’ may have caused.

<sup>3</sup> This is a movement that started in the late 1990s and was consistent with the newspaper editorial policy and guidelines (*Folha de São Paulo* 1997).

<sup>4</sup> We adopted a straightforward categorical classification of the editorial content: positive, negative, and neutral. We classified as ‘positive’ articles that praised the government for a specific decision, or for the general guidelines of a given policy, throughout the entire text or its greater part. ‘Negative’ articles contained some degree of open criticism against the country’s foreign policy or its basic formulators (the

*Folha's* most prominent contender in the wealthy state of São Paulo, *O Estado de São Paulo*, published 64 editorials on Cardoso's foreign policy in the same period (1999-2002). Although the proportion may look similar, the content goes in the opposite direction. No less than 26 (40.6%) articles painted a flattering picture of the diplomatic service, whereas only 8 (12.5%) were critical to the government. In both cases, the considerable number of neutral articles (26 for *Folha* and 34 for *Estado*) reflects a trend of reporting to the reader the economic and diplomatic challenges faced by the Cardoso administration, with no open ideological or political commitment.

This picture provides an interesting start to our argument. If it is correct to assume that Lula's foreign policy had utterly departed from his predecessor's – moving from a liberal-internationalist position to a nationalist-globalist one (SARAIVA, 2010) – then understanding the press behavior towards the new government's diplomacy as of 2003 would simply be a matter of inverting the signs. *Folha* would be less critical, and *Estado* would take up the opposition role. However, things did not turn out as expected: both periodicals have raised the voice against President Lula's foreign policy, as well as against the diplomatic service, the Foreign Minister, the outcomes of Brazil's strategies abroad, the relationship between the PT and foreign policy goals, and so forth<sup>5</sup>.

The triumph of Lula da Silva in 2002 has therefore led to a great deal of convergence in mass media content – *against* the recently elected government. It must be clear that we do not subscribe to what has been called by some journalists and bloggers the 'Coupist Press Party' (*Partido da Imprensa Golpista*, PIG), a label that overestimates, in an almost conspiratorial way, the ability of the mass media to coordinate their political and editorial interests. In any case, at least when it comes to foreign policy issues, one may notice a growing degree of similarity between what has been published in *Folha* and *Estado* – not just in their editorials, but also by their permanent and guest

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President and/or the Foreign Service). 'Neutral' is understood here as a general comment on the challenges faced by the Foreign Ministry, be they at the level of the country's strategies and/or the global transformations, without a specific critical or complimentary tone.

<sup>5</sup> Although it exceeds the scope of this article, it is important to mention that such 'wave of criticism' against the country's diplomacy also involved other mass media giants, such as *O Globo* (daily newspaper based in Rio de Janeiro) and *Veja* (Brazil's most read weekly news magazine).

columnists. Many of the ‘theses’ advanced by the administration’s opponents – such as an excessive ‘personalism’ in foreign affairs, a retrograde third-worldism and anti-Americanism, or the unwanted presence of a ‘special adviser’ on foreign policy, Marco Aurélio Garcia – were replicated, or sometimes even created, by the newspapers.

A simple quantitative look at the editorials published between 2003 and 2010<sup>6</sup>, which corresponds to President Lula’s both terms in office, reveals the critical trend in the relationship between the mass media and foreign policy. In comparison to the 63 articles that made reference to the diplomacy in late Cardoso years, *Folha de São Paulo* published 60 editorials on foreign policy throughout Lula’s first term, and 70 during the President’s last four years in office. As seen in Table 1, variation is slight, be it within a presidential term or between terms. Over the entire Lula administration, the newspaper dealt with diplomatic issues roughly on a three-week basis (an average of 16.25 editorials per year). The average is practically the same of the 1999-2002 period (15.75/year). If we consider that the occurrence of foreign policy issues in editorials was barely negligible in the previous years, the figures shown are meaningful; on the other hand, they suggest that *Folha* had no special interest in Lula’s diplomacy – at least no more than immediately before.

Data on editorials brought out by OESP displays a different trend. Between 1999 and 2002, the daily had published 64 articles on diplomatic affairs. This number rose sharply to 160 (a growth of 250%) on Lula’s first term, and reached 120 editorials in the 2007-2010 period. In 2003 alone, *Estado* issued 37 opinions, in contrast with 5 in 1999 (and, for that matter, 9 in 1995 – Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s first year in office). During Lula’s presidency, such editorials were published three times a month (or 35 a year), more than twice as much as in the previous four years. Unlike its main rival, *O Estado de São Paulo* has demonstrated greater concern with Lula da Silva’s foreign policy.

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<sup>6</sup> Using the basic search engines at the newspapers’s websites (<http://www.folha.uol.com.br> and <http://acervo.estadao.com.br>), we have filtered all editorials according to the following criteria: (1) they must contain the words “*diplomacia*” or “Itamaraty”; (2) they must deal directly with aspects of Brazilian foreign policy, be them at the level of policymaking, international strategies, or both.

**Table 1 – Editorials on foreign policy published in FSP and OESP, 1999-2010**

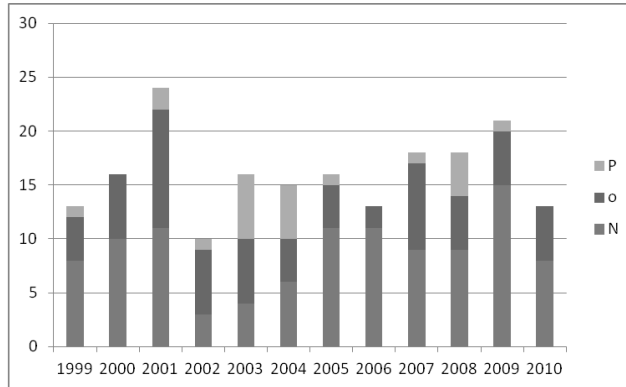
		Folha de São Paulo				O Estado de São Paulo			
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
FHC 2	1999	8	4	1	13	1	0	4	5
	2000	10	6	0	16	2	3	8	13
	2001	11	11	2	24	1	12	7	20
	2002	3	6	1	10	6	13	7	26
Lula 1	2003	4	6	6	16	15	18	4	37
	2004	6	4	5	15	28	10	0	38
	2005	11	4	1	16	28	10	1	39
	2006	11	2	0	13	36	10	0	46
Lula 2	2007	9	8	1	18	19	12	2	33
	2008	9	5	4	18	7	12	0	19
	2009	15	5	1	21	24	9	1	34
	2010	8	5	0	13	25	8	1	34

Source: <http://folha.uol.com.br> and <http://acervo.estadao.com.br>. Data compiled by the author.

These figures, however, are only part of the story. We must qualify the content of these editorials in order to have a more specific picture of how diplomacy was portrayed by the mass media in the Lula years. As already suggested, commentaries were mostly derogatory towards the government. The general impression is confirmed by a closer look at what was written and published. Out of the 60 articles issued by FSP between 2003 and 2006, at least 32 were explicitly critical of Lula's diplomacy (53.3%), whereas only 12 praised the President or his foreign service (20%). The case of *Estado* against the administration was even harsher: while 107 of the 160 editorials (66.9%) were unfavorable towards foreign policy, an unimpressive five positive comments (3.1%) were issued throughout Lula's first term.

The picture did not change much when it came to the President's second term. In a total of 70 editorials, *Folha* attacked the Foreign Service or its decisions in 41 of them (58.5%). The number of articles with complimentary remarks was even smaller than in the previous years, totaling only six (8.6%). The historical series of the newspaper's behavior is shown in Figure 1.

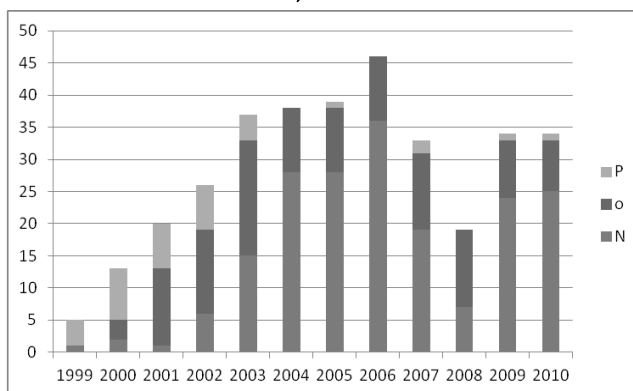
**Figure 1 – Number of editorials (by content) published by *Folha de São Paulo*, 1999-2010**



P = positive; o = neutral; N = negative. Data available at <http://folha.uol.com.br> and compiled by the author.

In the case of *Estadão*, the trend followed suit – out of 120 commentaries published by the newspaper, 75 were dedicated to crucifying the country’s foreign policy (62.5%) whereas only four were (moderately) laudatory (3.3%). The aggregate results are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 – Number of editorials (by content) published by *O Estado de São Paulo*, 1999-2010**



P = positive; o = neutral; N = negative. Data available at <http://acervo.estadao.com.br> and compiled by the author.

**Assessing the content of editorials: what did the newspapers say?**

Did the newspapers agree on positive and negative aspects of Lula's foreign policy? To answer this, we must turn to the thematic content of the editorials so as to identify to what extent did opinions converge on the many topics of foreign policy. Many themes were recurring in the Lula da Silva years, such as trade diplomacy at the WTO or regional integration. The relationship between Brazil and Latin America's leftist leaders, such as Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro, and Evo Morales, was particularly controversial. On most of them, the newspapers converged substantially, if not perfectly. We decided, however, to choose two major topics that were salient in the media and encompass some of the key foreign policy issues of that time: (1) the negotiations of the FTAA and Brazil-US bilateral relations (North-South axis); (2) South-South cooperation with China, Africa and the Middle East. They are meaningful because they allow us to compare a situation in which the press agreed with one in which opinions differed.

***(1) FTAA and Brazil-U.S. relations***

The FTAA appeared quite often in commentaries over the first couple of years of the Lula administration. This has to do with the importance negotiations on hemispheric integration assumed for Brazil in the early 2000s. *Folha* has given an overall positive judgment to the Brazilian posture at the negotiation table with the US, inasmuch as the Foreign Ministry did not surrender to the pressure for an unfavorable agreement. "It is obvious that Itamaraty should not mistake firmness for intransigence, but should not accept that the negotiation becomes a synonym for subservience, either. In general lines, Brazilian policy has been correct. So far, change does not seem necessary" (*A Alca que interessa*, October 15, 2003). The newspaper expresses a favorable stance to the existence of the free trade zone, as long as it did not put the interests of the country's economic sectors at risk. That would only be possible if Brazil should use its political clout and regional leadership to counterweight the American interests. "The US wants to implement the Free Trade Area of the Americas already in 2005, and an FTAA arrangement that did not include Brazil would be less than half FTAA. More than that, Lula is also a leader in South America" (*Lula e Bush*, June 21, 2003).

*Estado*, on the other hand, condemns the nation's diplomacy stance towards the FTAA. It affirms that the free trade area is undeniably good for Brazilian trade, and shows surprise with the positions adopted by Itamaraty. "The failure of the FTAA (...) is not in Brazil's interests (...). But the top decisionmakers of national diplomacy seem committed to bring down hemispheric negotiations" (*É preciso trabalhar pela Alca*, October 1st, 2003). The risk of isolation, according to the editors, would be the loss of economic dynamism and competitiveness, especially against aggressive markets such as China. The diplomatic mistake of rejecting the FTAA, the newspaper goes, is rooted in a purely ideological calculus, which may be attributed both to the President's Special Advisor to International Affairs, Marco Aurélio Garcia, and to the Secretary General of Itamaraty, ambassador Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães. "With such strategy, it is evident that Brazilian exports, albeit on the rise, will grow much less than they could. There are those who consider such policy a proof of patriotism" (*Uma nova estratégia para a Alca*, February 10, 2004).

Many of the editorials build their criticism on the lost opportunities in trade with the United States. Regarding this point, *Folha de São Paulo* is less critical: it subscribes to the Foreign Ministry's decision to resist against agreements that could hamper Brazilian trade and welcomes the positive bilateral relations with the Bush government: "Indeed, [State Secretary Condoleezza] Rice's trip [to Brazil] (...) does not seem to confirm current interpretations that the Brazilian diplomacy follows a line of distancing from the United States. Despite trade misgivings, disputes over the FTAA, the opposition against the War in Iraq and the anti-American leaning of some sectors within Itamaraty, Lula's Brazil has played in the region the role the U.S. expects" (*A parceria Brasil-EUA*, April 28, 2005). *Folha*, however, was very cautious in times when Brasilia decided to confront Washington in sensitive issues as biofuels or trade disputes. Negotiation, not retaliation, was the best strategy against the world's greatest economic power (*À mesa com os EUA*, April 7, 2010).

As regards Brazil-U.S. relations, we may notice the different standing of both dailies. OESP attacks Lula's administration on the grounds that confronting the United States only benefits "those Brazilians who think that

the country's self-respect may be assured by childish and counterproductive bravados" (*A retórica da reciprocidade*, January 9, 2004). Furthermore, many of Brazil's diplomatic decisions were understood as an anti-Americanist turn, from the exclusion of the eliminatory character of the English language in the Admission Exam to the Rio Branco Institute (*O fator 'senso de ridículo'*, January 13, 2005) to the relationship with developing and emerging countries: "[i]n a globalized world, politically and militarily unipolar, and marked by United States and European economic, technological and trade superiority, foreign policy goes fifty years back in time, in the attempt of forging a South-South axis that is not attractive to anyone except for the nostalgic third-worldists of General Geisel" (*Política feita de equívocos*, May 4, 2005). Rejecting the FTAA was, according to an editorial published in late 2010, one of the greatest diplomatic follies of Lula's diplomacy, a folly about which Foreign Minister Amorim would often boast (*A Alca e os complexados*, September 14, 2010).

## ***(2) South-South cooperation***

While the debacle of the FTAA had meant a handful of lost opportunities to Brazil, the alternative found in South-South trade had been essentially fruitless. The recognition of China as a 'market economy' had, for instance, undermined the competitiveness of the Brazilian industry. The government's decision was grousched by business leaders, mostly at the Federation of Industries of São Paulo (FIESP), and has resonated negatively in both newspapers. *Folha* points out the irony behind the government recognizing the People's Republic but not giving a word about the repression associated with the communist regime: "as for Itamaraty, that does not lose a chance to delay the signature of free trade agreements with Western powers, always on behalf of the 'self-assurance' before the wealthier, it is curious that it does not give any sign with reference to the Chinese dictatorship and to the trade distortions sponsored by it" (*Concessão à China*, November 16, 2004). In the view of *Estado*, the worst part of the proximity with Beijing is that it had no counterpart whatsoever, representing a flunked attempt at the outset: "There is no strategy. There is just confusion and illusion. The priorities chosen by the Brazilian diplomacy lead to nowhere, because no other emerging power is interested in the politico-ideological fantasies that guide Itamaraty" (*Cortesãos e Mascates*, November 28, 2004).



The relationship with Africa and the Middle East was also severely condemned as part of the grand design of Brazilian foreign policy. Although *Folha* points out that there might have been a positive aspect behind Lula's official visits to African countries, especially at the symbolic level, the technical aspects of bilateral negotiations were simply ignored, as in the case of the mistakes made in the president's trip to Nigeria, "which were laughable" (*Frustração na África*, April 13, 2005). The most worrisome aspect of Brazil's Africa policy, however, was the complete and utter disdain for human rights in the relationship with long-standing dictators. Abstaining against human rights violations in Darfur was, in the view of *Folha's* editors, a careless move driven by the 'obsession' for a permanent seat in the Security Council, as one editorial argues: "in search of support, Brazil has cast some of the most shameful votes in the history of its diplomacy" (*Diplomacia e ditadura*, October 17, 2007). To OESP, Brazil's new move towards Africa was purely ideological and part of an attempt of third-worldist indoctrination within the Foreign Service. "The distance between political-economic fiction that lulls the dreams of the president and real life was, throughout his trip [to five African nations], a worrisome and surely embarrassing issue" (*As fantasias africanas de Lula*, November 9, 2003). The relationship with autocracies was also shameful, according to the newspaper, as in the case of Lula's visit to Burkina Faso: "It is dispiriting to see President Lula putting his great personal prestige and the affection of the Africans for Brazil at the service of that miserable country's dictator" (*Legitimando um ditador*, October 17, 2007).

It was in Brazil's relations with Middle-Eastern countries, nonetheless, that the Lula administration has received its fiercest criticism – but also some moderate praise. *Folha*, on its part, has signaled towards a positive engagement of Brazil's diplomacy with regional issues after the official visits paid by the presidents of Israel, Iran, and the Palestinian Authority to Brasilia in late 2009. In this sense, Brazil should be able to share the example of its multicultural society abroad. "It starts with the example of pacific coexistence between citizens of the most diverse ethnic origins and religious beliefs – and of the rejection of interventionism – that Brazil may exert influence, albeit moderate, in the bloody chessboard of the Middle East" (*Recepção equilibrada*, November 25, 2009). But since Lula's first years in office the newspaper had shown some

caution when it came to Middle Eastern affairs. On the relationship with Syria, for example, *Folha* warned that “there are no historical, political or commercial bonds between the governments of Lula and Assad (...). The widespread sensation is that Itamaraty has turned an anti-American obduracy into its main political guideline” (*Brasil erra com a Síria*, March 5, 2005). Finally, the Iranian conundrum – that has led to a fuel swap deal brokered by Brazil and Turkey in May 2010 – has also received a great deal of attention. The agreement was, according to the newspaper, “a controversial and frightful initiative” (*A outra questão iraniana*, June 16, 2010), and the friendship between Lula and the president of Iran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, was excessively ideological. “By courting autocrats such as Ahmadinejad (...), president Lula has set the tone, which was seconded by Amorim, Garcia and other aides, of a foreign policy marked by clash. It is about time to change the score, the conductor, and its soloists” (*Em outro tom*, November 13, 2010).

The Brazilian position on human rights violations perpetrated by the Iranian regime have led *Estado* to dismiss Lula's foreign policy in the Middle East. “It is an intellectually poor – and morally thin – reasoning with which Foreign Minister Celso Amorim attempted to justify Brazil's abstention on the international draft resolution that condemned Iran for ‘recurring human rights violations’ (...). There are no mitigating factors for the complicity with barbarism (*Cúmplices da barbárie*, November 24, 2010). In a passage that summarizes the main impressions OESP had of President Lula's diplomacy, Brasilia's decision to engage Middle Eastern issues is portrayed as a mixture of amateurism, nationalism, illusions of grandeur: “President Lula and Itamaraty (...) felt free to decide to solve problems on the other side of the world, and precisely the ones that, for years or decades, have made great powers lose their sleep, incapable as they were to promote peace in such regions. The intromission in the Israeli-Palestinian case was just pathetic. The involvement with Iran, on its part, is dangerous for it affects key issues of international security which Brazil is not ready to face” (*Os erros da política externa*, June 12, 2010).

Two considerations follow from this discussion. First of all, the newspapers shared the impression that Lula's foreign policy suffered from a number of problems, such as the president's excessive voluntarism, the sheer pragmatism in the relationship with the ‘global South’ (contrasted with the ideological partnerships in Latin America), and the unwanted influence of a

non-diplomat, Marco Aurélio Garcia, in foreign affairs. OESP has gone so far as to say it was a ‘four-headed diplomacy’, conducted by a powerless foreign minister, his ideological secretary-general Guimarães, and also by Garcia, an amateurish presidential aide, and José Dirceu, the most powerful minister during Lula’s first term and a close friend of Fidel Castro (*Diplomacia quadricéfala*, April 27, 2005). As a result, *Folha*’s editors point out, that administration’s diplomacy was marked by a lack of coherence that increased over time: “the level of tunelessness of Lula’s foreign policy (...) inspires caution and explanation” (*Ruídos diplomáticos*, July 3, 2009).

Secondly, but no less important, *Folha* and *Estado* may have criticized the government for different reasons – even when the target was the same. FSP rejected the *means*, but not necessarily the *ends* of foreign policy: “If the goals are correct, the same cannot be said of the means to achieve them during the Lula period. Our foreign policy has lost virtue to the extent it was used to minimize the frustration of the domestic party militancy, a mistake worsened by the stupid Manichaeism that so often prevailed in the decisions of the president and his aides” (*Política externa*, October 1st, 2010). OESP, on the other hand, dismissed both with equal harshness, as can be seen in the following passage: “when it comes to foreign policy, competence and realism were substituted by the ‘parade diplomacy’, moved by a half-baked third-worldism and by the president’s personal ambition. The government despised opportunities of trade agreements with the most developed markets and gave priority to a delirious South-South policy” (*Ganhos e perdas da era Lula*, December 30, 2010).

### **Final remarks**

Lula’s administration has changed foreign policy in many ways. First, it has taken Brazil’s global recognition to a whole different level, as the nation’s voice could finally be heard in multilateral negotiations, international conflicts, financial institutions, and bilateral contacts with credibility and assertiveness. Second, it has restored the open developmentalist strategy that has marked Brazilian foreign policy in the second half of the twentieth century. Third, as stated in foreign minister Celso Amorim’s inauguration speech back in 2003, it

has contributed to involving 'the society as a whole' in foreign affairs, making the country's global agenda particularly salient among domestic actors.

But raising the profile of the country abroad has come with a price. If the achievements of diplomacy under Lula da Silva have received a great deal of attention, the same can be said of its blunders. However subjective this judgment may be, the president and his foreign service have been condemned for what they have done, from Haiti to Honduras, from Iran to Venezuela, from the FTAA to Mercosur. The analysis of the how the mass media commented on the Brazilian foreign policy in recent years has provided, in this sense, a robust example of how the press behaved towards the Lula administration at large. Despite the differences shown in the coverage offered by both newspapers, we may notice that OESP and FSP alike were extremely critical of the government. Still, the underlying reasons may not have been the same. While *Folha* has condemned foreign policy at an almost personal level, blaming the president and his aides for any misconducts but commending some of its goals, *Estado* completely diverged from Lula's diplomacy in its worldviews, actors, and methods.

The pluralization of actors with a stake in foreign affairs has allowed for the mass media to bring diplomacy to the top of their agenda. Presidentialization, on its part, has taken foreign policy to the political battlefield, for good and bad. Whereas this may seem a liability for a charismatic president, judging by the number and depth of attacks Lula has received, it may also be an important asset. After all, popular approval of foreign policy has followed the president's huge popularity, which has ultimately undermined any attempts of newspapers to set the foreign policy agenda. This, however, is a discussion for works to come.

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**ABSTRACT**

This article looks at this new relationship, in the light of two concurrent trends: the pluralization of actors with stakes in foreign policy; and an active presidential diplomacy (CASON AND POWER 2009). We argue that, more than just a battlefield of ideas, Brazil's most prominent media vehicles have played an active role against Lula's foreign policy, although they had but a limited agenda-setting capacity. To this end, the text will be divided in four sections. The first one deals with the recent developments of foreign policymaking in Brazil, and seeks to understand how the introduction of new actors and institutions has affected the political balance behind the country's external relations. The second provides an overview of Lula's foreign policy strategies and their relationship with presidential diplomacy. The third offers some data on the behavior of two selected newspapers, *Folha de São Paulo* (FSP) and *O Estado de São Paulo* (OESP), on foreign policy issues. The third and final section compares media reactions to Brazil's relations with the United States, most specifically regarding negotiations on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and to some aspects of Brazilian South-South cooperation, and discusses the most relevant results.

**KEYWORDS**

Lula; Media; Brazilian Foreign Policy;

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