

# Book Review

## *Novos Olhares Sobre a Política Externa Brasileira*

**Leonardo Augusto Peres\***

Westmann, Gustavo (ed). 2017. *Novos Olhares Sobre a Política Externa Brasileira*. São Paulo: Contexto. 272pp.

The idea that foreign policy is not only a policy for the state, but for its *society* – foreign policy as ‘public policy’ – surfaces in every essay in *Novos Olhares sobre a Política Externa Brasileira*. The argument arising from it is that foreign policy should serve all citizens, rather than just political elites who run the state. To achieve that, Brazilian Foreign Policy must be more democratic, open to participation from civil society, accountable, representative. This idea is clear in Part 1 of the book, which presents essays on broad contemporary challenges faced by Brazilian Foreign Policy. Those challenges arise both from a dynamic international arena and from changing domestic politics. Part 2 consists of essays on specific substantive topics of international concern for Brazil. The argument for a plural foreign policy permeates them as well.

In times of political turmoil such as the one Brazil is currently going through, this argument for a plural foreign policy is a necessary realisation, and a powerful argument. Repression against protesters, suppression of social rights, and other acts from the government seem to counteract all previous efforts from the Foreign Affairs Ministry towards a democratic Foreign Policy. Since the early 2000s, the Ministry had sought to broaden its strategic partnerships and bilateral relations. It prioritized South-South relations, multilateralism, and reaching countries in Africa, in Asia, and in the Middle East. Social themes were paramount in the agenda. For example, states and international organisations praised and replicated the ‘Fome Zero’ program. In return, such Foreign Policy increased Brazil’s social capital around the world. It opened new markets and brought new partnerships that reflected in Brazilian society. The Brazilian economy improved to become the sixth largest in the world. Furthermore, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) removed the country from the world hunger map.

Six essays make up the first part of the book. Felipe Antunes de Oliveira opens the book discussing the concept of ‘development’ for Brazilian Foreign Policy. He points out

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the changes it went through from the end of the last century to the beginning of this century, when it must serve 'social transformation.' The second essay is by Guilherme Casarões, who seeks to contextualise Brazilian Foreign Policy in a world in crisis. He warns against abandoning foreign policy projects because of their alleged 'ideology'. In the fast pace of Brazilian politics today, Casarões' essay, although of great analytical power, unfortunately became dated too soon. It would be interesting to see what the author would say about further developments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Gustavo Westmann then discusses new challenges to Brazilian diplomacy. He argues for a more transparent foreign policy and for reforming Itamaraty cadres, among other changes. Those are clear opportunities for democratisation of Brazilian Foreign Policy. In his essay, Dawisson Belém Lopes highlights the elitist and oligarchical bases of Brazilian Foreign Policy through a historical and theoretical perspective. It is a fundamental work for understanding its current state, and a warning for its future. In Tiago Ribeiro dos Santos' essay the argument for a more democratic foreign policy is less explicit. He argues for applying 'slow thinking' to the formation of diplomatic knowledge. One can add, though, that broad civil society participation is essential in this process. Finally, Hayle Gadelha reflects on Brazilian soft power. The logical conclusion of his essay is that to maintain such soft power would require a policy that takes into account not only the state, but also its people.

Part 2 of the book comprises eight essays dealing with relevant themes for Brazil's Foreign Policy agenda. The first two concern specific geographic areas that must be of paramount attention for Brazil if the country seeks to have more diversified strategic partnerships. The first of them is Africa, which is the focus of Patrícia Campos Mello's attention in her essay about the 'melancholic decline' of Brazil's policy of establishing closer ties to the continent. She warns against the decline of soft power gained by Brazil in Africa during Lula's administration. The second area is Asia. In his essay, Flávio Campestrin Betarello argues for Brazil's quick insertion in the region. Based on the adaptability of Brazilian Foreign Policy, and on the example from other states that are already celebrating deeper Asian partnerships, Brazil must aim at closer ties with China. The next six essays focus on a diversified agenda per se, to include the following themes: cooperation for development, food security, sustainable development, climate change regime, international organisations, and internet governance. What all these themes have in common is Brazil's potential – made clear by the authors – to become a reference in each one of them. For that to happen, developments in Brazilian Foreign Policy during the beginning of the twenty-first century must not regress. Foreign policy cannot be relegated to a secondary place in public administration.

Improvements in Brazilian international projection in the last decades show the need for more diversified and plural Foreign Policy thought and practice. *Novos Olhares* provides that in its first and second parts, respectively. The book makes the case for a more democratic Brazilian Foreign Policy. It is fundamental for those who wish to think about its future as a public policy aiming at improving Brazilian state and society. This is indispensable in this moment in which Brazil becomes increasingly disengaged not only internationally, but with its own society as well.

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Westmann, Gustavo (ed). 2017. *Novos Olhares Sobre a Política Externa Brasileira*. São Paulo: Contexto.

## About the Author

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