

A systemic approach to Brazilian foreign policy

Abordagem sistêmica da política externa do Brasil

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Abstract: This paper offers an overview of the Brazilian foreign policy during the first decade of the present century, devoting special attention to president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's years (2003-2010). It is based on an understanding of the Brazilian foreign policy as a policy founded on tradition with important traces of continuity and sees the inflections that still exist as a result from different governmental choices. A systemic approach is proposed, which leads to the understanding that the change in the Brazilian foreign policy is a result of two factors: the ideational and the pragmatic one. Both control political decisions that lead to conflicting directions. The result of such conflicting pressure is a series of foreign policy positions scattered over time. This analytical model is visually represented by a pendulum sketch, whose movement between two extreme positions represents many political possibilities.

Keywords: Brazilian foreign policy. Autonomy and development. Continuity and inflections.

Resumo: Apresenta-se neste artigo uma visão geral da política externa do Brasil durante a primeira década deste século, dedicando especial atenção ao período de governo de Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010). A análise baseia-se na compreensão de que a política externa do Brasil fundamenta-se numa tradição com importantes traços de continuidade e apresenta inflexões decorrentes de diferentes escolhas governamentais. Utiliza-se uma abordagem sistêmica que leva à compreensão da política externa do Brasil como resultado de duas ordens de fatores: ideacional e pragmática, presentes nas decisões políticas e essencialmente conflitivas entre si. O resultado dessas tensões é a ocorrência de variadas orientações de política externa ao longo do tempo. A política externa do Brasil é representada na figura de um pêndulo, cujas oscilações entre posições extremas, ilustram as situações políticas reais.

Palavras-chave: Política externa do Brasil. Autonomia e desenvolvimento. Continuidade e inflexões.

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Introduction

We aim at giving an overview of the Brazilian foreign policy during the first decade of the present century, devoting special attention to president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's mandates (2003-2010). This approach is based on an understanding of the Brazilian foreign policy as founded on tradition with important traces of continuity (Cervo, 2007; Lafer, 2004) and sees the inflections that still exist as a result from different governmental choices. Concerning Lula's government, we agree with Lessa (2010), who notes that the foreign policy has presented continuity in some aspects and inflections in others, but had no ruptures, in spite of the presidential activism.

We propose a systemic approach, which leads to the understanding that the change in the Brazilian foreign policy is a result of two factors: the ideational and the pragmatic one. Both control political decisions that lead to conflicting directions. The result of such conflicting pressure is a series of foreign policy positions scattered over time. This analytical model will be visually represented by a pendulum sketch, whose movement between two extreme positions represents many political possibilities.

Based on Cervo (2007; 2010) and Pinheiro (2010), we can identify two key notes of the Brazilian foreign policy: development and autonomy. Both are partly responsible for the Brazilian foreign policy continuity dimension, as well as for controlling the foreign policy decisions that have been made at least since the 1930s. They also react to inflections only because reflect different related governmental preferences. The first one, development, encourages the pragmatic choices whereas the second, autonomy, encourages the ideational ones. Thus, the Brazilian foreign policy decisions aiming at these key ideas move the pendulum to opposite directions. The search for development cannot seriously damage the autonomy tasks and vice-versa, at the risk of having policies changed. Pinheiro (2010) affirms that, historically, when the Brazilian foreign policy results benefit neither the development nor the autonomy, governmental goals change the policy. In a visual representation, this change moves the pendulum between two points, one pragmatic (development) and another ideational (autonomy).

To better explain our reasoning, this article is organized in three parts. The first one presents the theoretical approach rooted in a systemic view. The second part explains the main aspects of Brazilian foreign policy and underscores its continuity lines. The third part presents an overview of Brazilian foreign policy in the last decade and analyzes the Brazilian performance in relation to current international challenges and domestic structural limits. The

final remarks link the pendulum idea to the Brazilian foreign policy continuity lines that we consider as being persistently present.

An analytical model to understand the Brazilian foreign policy

The theoretical frame of this analysis collects some contributions from Watson (2004) about social change; and from Weldes (1999) and Kratochwill (2011) about the national interest behind foreign policy understood as a political construction. The idea of a pendulum representing the Brazilian foreign policy movements was taken from Watson's (2004) approach to international society. According to Watson (2004), the pendulum metaphor is appropriate to understand the choices of political systems over time. To the author, political choices historically oscillate between two extreme positions: to conduct the political system to complete independence or to total subordination to a power center. Each of these positions has positive and negative aspects: great freedom with extreme anarchy in the former case and great authoritarianism with extreme oppression in the latter. The choices made by political systems aim at simultaneously avoiding the horrors of oppression without losing authority or, in other words, providing maximum possible freedom without having anarchy. The search for the best position leads political systems to moderate behavior. According to Watson, political systems are attracted by a gravitational force towards a moderate position in the middle of the spectrum. Between the two ideal imaginary points – total independence and total subordination – many situations can be conceived in order to understand the international society evolution. The most suitable strategy is chosen to preserve the interests in place according to different historical eras.

As it will be suggested in the final remarks of this text, the Brazilian foreign policy follows a similar pendulum swing. In this case, the gravitational force that pulls the pendulum to a moderate position has been exerted for interests defined in terms of development and autonomy. The extreme positions represent choices that are modified by gravitational force every time interests are affected by former choices.

Like Weldes (1999), we conceive the national interest behind foreign policy as a social construction, shaped by an interaction between domestic and external realities. This phenomenon is also permanently retraced and its definition depends on the interests of sectors that are in a hegemonic economic or political position. In a pluralistic regime, many other social sectors take part in the process of definition of national interests, and a pluralistic society is permanently including new actors and claims, continuously retracing the imaginary nation boards. Kratochwill (2011) remembers that,

in extremes situations, an authoritative decision may be inevitable. When a foreign agenda provokes internal political divisions, governmental authorities should establish what is in the nation's interest, disclosing a preference, but not a personal or private preference; a preference with strong social support. Therefore, when we refer here to pragmatic decisions – national interests – we do not ignore that those involve politically defined preferences. Cervo (2007) affirms that in times when external agenda did not involve important resource redistribution, the Brazilian foreign policy was less controversial.

In the Brazilian case, the historical slower social inclusion has probably weakened the discussion around national interest definitions and made the Brazilian foreign policy less controversial over a long time. The social inclusion rhythm has accelerated in the last decades and produced important impacts on foreign policy. A new national interest conception involving solidarity and generosity has been shaped. However, it did not change the core of the national interest historically defined in terms of autonomy and development. Except for the possible fact that the current social inclusion has become more important for choosing a development strategy.

Differently from many others countries, Brazil's national interest has not been shaped around an idea of security, but towards notions of autonomy and development. Three reasons for it can be named (Lafer, 2004). Two of them concern the geopolitical factor. The first one, the fight for decisional autonomy has always played an important role in Brazil, as a middle power, either to minimize the influence of bigger countries or in order to preserve its own power in relation to weaker countries. The second one, as a country located in a pacific region, Brazil could develop a pacific international insertion while giving less priority to military strategies. In the third case, being free from strategic pressures and a long time underdeveloped country, Brazil's development goals have been the most important target since the last century. In short, decisional autonomy and development are the two main sources of the Brazilian national interest. Cervo (2007) and Pinheiro (2010) agree with this thesis. Development and autonomy goals were, according to them, on the top of the Brazilian foreign policy priorities during most of the time. The variations were due to different interpretations concerning how to better achieve those goals.

We conceive these priorities as *soft* dimensions of Brazil's national interests, apart from the other, *hard* dimension, which concerns territorial and people defense. As we see, due to geopolitical and economic factors in the Brazilian case, the *soft* dimension is more important than the *hard* one.

Main aspects of the Brazilian foreign policy in the last decade

As we affirmed above, foreign policies result from domestic and international pressures. The Brazilian case is not different. The internal and external realities continuously retrace the national interest core and the foreign policy profile. The geopolitical, economic, and political factors are the basis of the Brazilian foreign policy's main aspects.

Since the 1980s Brazil has worked to stabilize its democracy, after a long period of military dominance (1964-1984). Nowadays, there are some signs that allow us to believe that this goal is close to be achieved. However, many others institutional, economic and social problems interfere in the internal political agenda, disturbing the country's international actions.

One may observe, for instance, that despite occupying the sixth position in 2011's global Gross Domestic Product ranking, Brazil occupies the tenth lowest Latin America position and the eighty-fourth global position in the Human Development Index ranking. That means that the social goals are among the biggest challenges for the country, and they require at least two decades of public inclusion policies to be won. Moreover, infrastructural problems and tax policies increase the obstacles to Brazil's sustainable growth.

Along with these enormous domestic problems, Brazil has to deal with several claims from neighboring countries stimulated by its regional privileged position. Brazil holds about 50% of South America's Gross Domestic Product and population. It occupies 50% of South America's area and shares borders with 10 out of 12 South American countries. This geopolitical condition is an important structural factor that explains some aspects of the Brazilian foreign policy, such as its preference for pacific solutions regarding controversies.

In general terms, Brazilian foreign policy experts identify some permanent ideas in the core of the Brazilian foreign policy that support the so called continuity lines, shaped during the last century. Despite its pre-Republic bellicosity, Brazil has worked its own image throughout the last century as a cooperative force, which favors multilateral relationships and pacific resolutions rather than conflicts. Although being identified with such pacific profile is seen as a positive thing for Brazil, this is purely a means for the country to achieve its goals based on the aforementioned specific condition. Two mentioned ideas resound throughout the Brazilian foreign policy: development and autonomy.

According to Cervo (2007), the development idea has been inserted in the Brazilian foreign policy basis since the 1930s, when a governmental industrialization policy was implemented. The author identifies four

paradigms for the Brazilian foreign policy, depending on the economic state's involvement: liberal conservative (from the 19th century until 1930), developmental (from 1930 to 1989), normal (or neo-liberal) and logistic (from 1989 on). Among them, only the second paradigm was strongly based on State action. The normal and logistic paradigms are grounded in the Brazilian strategies for international insertion that have been effective since the 1990s.

Figure 1. Brazilian foreign policy's paradigms linked to development priorities

Paradigms	Periods	Main interest
Liberal conservative	19th century – 1930	Agrarian oligarchy
Developmental	1930-1989	Industrial sectors
Neo-liberal Logistic with different combinations	1989 – present	Economic international insertion

Source: Made by the author based on Cervo (2007).

The first one, the liberal conservative, controlled decisions related to foreign policies from the Brazilian independence (1822) until 1930. During this period, the Brazilian decision making elite was composed by the agrarian oligarchy. The development lines were defined by that elite, whose interests concerned primary product exportation. The developmental paradigm started with public policies and was adopted to promote industrialization in the 1930s. According to Cervo, it went through different phases until 1989, when the conditions that favored such rationality disappeared. After that, some aspects of both the neo-liberal and logistic paradigms were combined in order to provide Brazil's international insertion. This strategy was encouraged by the State and implemented by both private and mixed companies.

In general terms, it is possible to observe a kind of consensus in relation to priorities of development during the country's recent history. In this sense, one of Cervo's interesting conclusions is that, in spite of political changes, it is possible to observe continuity lines in the Brazilian foreign policy during the last decades. He states that in Brazil's recent history, political changes have not been directly related to foreign policy, which means that there were some political changes without changes to the Brazilian foreign policy. On the other

hand, some changes in the Brazilian foreign policy took place during the same regime or government.

Each time a FP option was deemed endangering to development, a policy change occurred. During Fernando Henrique Cardoso's (FHC) government, for instance, when the liberal strategy resulted more in social damage than economic progress, the government decreased its enthusiastic adherence to liberal globalization. The same happened during the military regime: when the alignment with the USA did not turn out well to Brazil's economic interests, it was diminished. This behavior is probably due to special relations between the political regime and the foreign policy in Brazil. We argue that political regime changes do not affect the development and political autonomy of the Brazilian foreign policy's priorities. In Cervo's point of view, this phenomenon discloses a State foreign policy rather than a governmental one.

Differently from Cervo, who holds a historical and economic focus on the Brazilian foreign policy, Pinheiro's (2010) analysis pays closer attention to specific political aspects. She works with another strong idea: autonomy¹, which has been sought after by Brazil through different strategies since the Republic's origin (1889). According to Pinheiro, this period can be divided in phases ranging from the American alignment (pragmatic or ideological) to globalism (Grotian or Hobbesian).

Figure 2. Brazilian foreign policy phases linked to autonomy idea

Pragmatic Americanism 1902-1945
Ideological Americanism 1946-1951
Pragmatic Americanism 1951-1961
Grotian Globalism 1961-1964
Ideological Americanism 1964-1967
Pragmatic Americanism 1967-1974
Hobbesian Globalism 1974-1990

Source: Made by the author based on Pinheiro (2010).

¹ Autonomy is defined as the capability of making decisions without foreign interference. Like other instable concepts, the definition of autonomy can be altered in accordance with the historical context.

Thus, as other experts, she states that the Brazilian foreign policy oscillated between Americanism and globalism. She adds that Americanism has varied between ideological and pragmatic emphases. The first one, ideological Americanism, occurred when decision-making perceptions suggested that Brazil's interests would be benefited if the country adopted American values. The second one, pragmatic Americanism, arises from realistic decision-making perceptions about international relations. For this perception, each State should permanently negotiate its advantages in order to achieve its interests (Pinheiro, 2010).

Globalism took place when the dominant perception among decision makers had that Brazil should look for partnerships among its peers. According to Pinheiro, this Brazilian foreign policy orientation can be also divided in two emphases. One of them attached to a "Grotian"² perspective, whose main idea suggests that the adherence to international law is the way to achieve an egalitarian and pacific global order. The other emphasis was linked to a "Hobbesian"³ or realistic approach, and conceives the international relations commanded by interests in an anarchic order, in which each stakeholder should act in order to achieve and preserve its own interests.

According to this understanding, Pinheiro divides the Brazilian foreign policy in periods. The pragmatic Americanism was in force during the following periods: 1902-1945; 1951-1961 and 1967-1974. In these cases, Brazil used the advantages of such Americanism to obtain better results on the international front. The ideological Americanism strengthened after the Second World War (1946-1951), when the pragmatic and authoritarian Vargas government was succeeded by Dutra's, which showed to Washington the Brazilian adhesion to democratic values. This orientation was also in force during the first military government (1964-1967), whose regime needed external recognition. The global Brazilian foreign policy orientation, at that time, invigorated twice during the period. In the first time (1961-1964), this orientation was implemented with a "Grotian" emphasis, and in the second time (1974-1990) it was adopted with a realistic or "Hobbesian" orientation (Pinheiro, 2010).

If we compare Cervo's and Pinheiro's analyses and remember Watson's pendulum idea, we could conceive the behavior of the Brazilian foreign

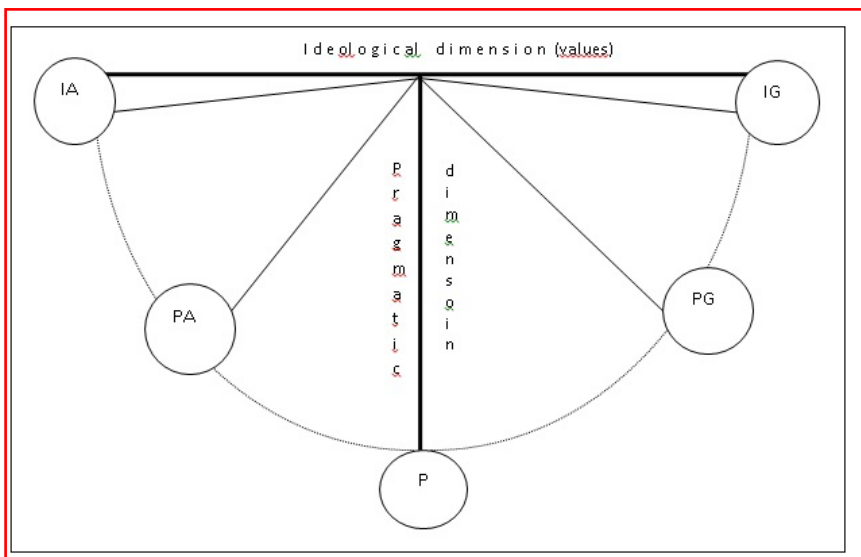
² An allusion to Hugo Grotius, considered the international father of law.

³ An allusion to Thomas Hobbes, considered one of the most important thinkers of political realism.

policy during the last century as a kind of pendulum (Figure 3), whose projected extremes are at one moment totally aligned (IA) and at another in total autonomy (GG). Both extremes are based on ideological convictions and values. The material interests, founded on a pragmatic perception about the best way to achieve the country's development, pull the pendulum to a moderate position.

In other words, the horizontal line represents the ideological dimension of perceptions, in which the values prevail in political decisions. Differently from that, the vertical line represents the pragmatic dimension of perceptions, in which the material interests are more important than values in political decisions. Both ideological and pragmatic dimensions are present in all political decision making, but they are combined differently according to historical circumstances, and this was responsible for different phases identified by authors as shown in the figure below.

Figure 3. Pendulum representing the Brazilian foreign policy oscillation



IA: Ideological Americanism; PA: Pragmatic Americanism; P: Pragmatism (material interests); PG: Pragmatic Globalism (Hobbesian Globalism); IG: Ideological globalism (Grotian Globalism).
Source: made by the author based on the literature referred in this paper.

The pressure of global capitalism for countries to open their economies has increased in the last decades. Brazil, like other countries, takes part in this global capitalist movement. Early in the 1990s the government was more enthusiastic with supposed globalization benefits, pushing the pendulum towards an ideological globalism point. However, while facing some international crises and negative social results a decade later, Brazil became more protectionist, and the pendulum swung back to a pragmatic globalism position.

In the 2000s, Brazil kept its process of economic internationalization, which had started in the previous decade, but at the same time reinforced protective policies through many political initiatives, like the so-called reciprocal multilateralism (Cervo, 2007; 2010). In this kind of multilateralism, differently from others practiced by Brazil,⁴ the government asks for reciprocity between structured economies and emergent countries not only in the trade field but also in other areas, such as economy, security, environment, health and human rights. Another way adopted intended to face global capitalism pressure was some kind of universalism, which we call here “pragmatic universalism”, like the so-called “Hobbesian globalism” (Pinheiro, 2010). This strategy reinforces the country historical relationships (South-America priority) and establishes many others (South-South Cooperation) aiming at increasing partnerships and business. Internally, the government strategy was criticized for reasons based on the struggle for benefits distribution. The main argument was based on the enormous domestic problems that should be solved before having money spent on expanding activities overseas. The internal policies adopted to face international crises – like income distribution and domestic market expansion policies through credit expansion – were considered insufficient to start a sustainable economic growing.

The global capitalism pressure, 2008’s international crisis, and the internal social and economic challenges limited the early 1990s enthusiasm with liberal agenda and reinforced the government’s movement towards a pragmatic orientation. According to Figure 3, the pendulum that moved, in the early 1990s, towards an Ideological globalism point, later swung back, pulled by the effect of international crises and domestic agenda, staying close to the Pragmatic globalism point.

⁴ Cervo (2007, 2010) distinguishes four Brazilian multilateralism phases: 1944-1949 – Brazilian participation in post-war order construction; 1960-1980 – Brazilian participation in the reform of international order; 1990-2002 – Brazilian action in the international system; 2003 – onwards – Brazilian action to establish reciprocity between structured economies and emergent countries.

Brazilian foreign policy's global pragmatism in the last decade

During Lula's period, the government decided to employ its relatively growing power to find an international negotiation model more compatible with its interests. In the globalization context, the economic internationalization was established as an element of national interest, like solidarity in relation to others countries (Amorim, 2007).⁵

Both models adopted to face the expansion of global capitalism – reciprocal multilateralism and pragmatic universalism – can be observed in many international relation levels. Concerning the first one, reciprocal multilateralism, Cervo (2010) analyzes the performance of Lula's government in five international areas: economy, trade, security, environment and health, and human rights. He concludes that in all of them Brazil worked with the purpose of obtaining results compatible with its concessions. According to his view, Brazil promoted an actual interdependence defined as “reciprocity in the achievement of interests through negotiation at different forums and economic internationalization” (Cervo, 2010, p. 12).

In order to reach such objectives in foreign trade, in 2003, for instance, the government gathered with other emerging powers to shape G-20. The main goals of this bloc were the liberalization of the agricultural market of central powers and trade concessions for manufacture in all emerging countries. What is called “pragmatic universalism” is a strategy that involves efforts to maintain and deepen relations with traditional partners (South America, the USA, and Europe) and to improve them with others such as China, India, and Japan. It also involved actions aiming at expanding Brazilian relations in the world. According to Lessa (2010), the Brazilian government implemented an ambitious strategy to expand its influence at an international level, and it had three primary objectives: (a) to have a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council; (b) to restore traditional trade markets and value others that were poorly explored before; (c) to project Brazilian business conglomerates in strategic sectors. According to Baumann (2010), the internationalization of

⁵ The country paid a high price for its solidarity strategy, especially in South America, where it faced disputes with Bolivia (2006) and Paraguay (2008) involving exploitation of natural resources. In both situations, Brazil had important material losses that were transformed into political costs. The term solidarity, used by the government to explain its preference for a kind of relationship based on mutual interests, was identified as an ideological preference despite national interests. Governmental authorities explained their national interest comprehension evoking middle and long-term reasons linked to regional prosperity and disconnected from the particular interests of some sectors. Minister Celso Amorim also explained that solidarity and national interests do not oppose each other. Solidarity can now serve middle and long-term national interests (Amorim, 2007; Lopes, 2011).

the Brazilian economy has undergone an unprecedented increase in the 2000s.⁶ This strategy “required an extraordinary effort to expand bilateral ties” aimed at the “sophistication of the agenda of cooperation with traditional partners” and at the extension of the “diplomatic network to previously untouched limits” (Lessa, 2010, p. 118). Despite enormous difficulties and oppositions, Brazil advanced towards its targets. Over the last decade, the country consolidated its emergent economic position alongside China, Russia, India, and South Africa, and occupied the sixth place on the 2011’s global PDG rank.

In spite of what many faultfinders have argued – not without reason – internal demands were prioritized in view of Brazil’s intense domestic agenda.⁷ According to them, the country was spending precious resources abroad that should be better used domestically, considering the huge social, economic and infrastructural problems.

This paper does not cover the first part (2010-2014) of Dilma Rousseff’s government, but if we had to use the pendulum model to represent the foreign policy performance of that time, it would be possible to see a swing towards the center, indicating abandonment of the emblematic “pragmatic globalism” of the external activism of Lula’s government. That change occurs in governments of a same party, which suggests the weight of other variables, such as the profile of the person in power and adaptation to the poor results of the previous foreign policy.

In fact, this is a dilemma that can’t be solved perfectly. As external and domestic levels are related, less attention being paid to international affairs may result in less favorable conditions to solve internal problems. On the other hand, if internal problems persist, the difficulties to face foreign affairs can be greater. It seems that the government’s option was to work in both spheres – domestic and international – with the same intensity. Internally, by fighting poverty; and at an international level, by opening new spaces to act.

Final remarks

We have maintained that the Brazilian foreign policy has presented much more continuity than ruptures during the Brazilian republican history, including the period under analysis. Nevertheless, many times the Brazilian

⁶ Based on Ambrozio (2009), Baumann (2010) affirms that between 2004 and 2006 the Brazilian Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) increased by 14% per year. The six most important Brazilian transnational companies, established in more than 13 countries, deal with steel, mining, energy, meat sectors, and other related sectors. Brazilian commercial banks are also involved.

⁷ Besides being at the eighty-fourth global position in the Human Development Index, Brazil suffers from important social and infrastructural policies deficit.

foreign policy was characterized by inflexions upon what we could describe as a continuity line. It occurred when important political events happened. Thus, the period under analysis was emblematic in the sense that it matches the first Workers' Party government since its creation in the eighties under the leadership of a proactive President. The inflection in terms of values that this event represented might just push the pendulum to an ideological extreme. However, pragmatic variables attached to the development target were also present. Moreover, this combination kept the pendulum around the pragmatic globalism point. During the period under analysis, the pendulum moved from a "liberal" position in the 1990s to a more realistic and pragmatic one, which involves State participation as according to Cervo's logistic paradigm.

The subsequent governmental period, under Dilma Rousseff's leadership, reinforced this performance and pulled the pendulum a little more towards a foreign low proactive agenda. It could represent a way back to a foreign policy in line with its centralist historical profile.

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Recebido em: 25 mar. 2015

Aprovado em: 30 set. 2015

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