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Brazil, the United States and the Tehran Declaration

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Abstract

Brazil has claimed the status of a key player within the international arena for the past decade, particularly during the two administrations of Lula da Silva (2003–2010). The Brazilian foreign policy team acted in relation to issues such as the Palestinian-Israeli Affairs and the Iranian Nuclear Program imbroglio with the international community presenting the country as a potential negotiator in matters of high politics. Yet, despite the success of the Tehran Declaration, Brazil faced some limitations due to the reactions of countries such as the United States, which displayed discontent towards Brazil's engagement in areas normally assigned to them. Making use of official documentation, speeches from authorities, and press articles we concluded that despite Brazil's status as a global power, it has not been able to face the great players such as the US in the world high politics.

Keywords: Brazil; Middle East; Turkey; Iran; United States; Lula da Silva; foreign policy; nuclear program.

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Introduction

Brazil's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era is regarded as autonomous and innovative, with the country carving out a niche for itself as an emerging power[1] and even as a global

[1] States with the ability to "politicize the global agenda and to generate a certain degree of activism" (Hirst 2013, 211); these countries believe that it is their duty to influence international institutions in order to make the world a place where democracy and human rights are promoted

player[2]. The level of independence which Brazil has reached today results from a set of initiatives to strengthen national power that have gradually been undertaken since the 1960s. Post-military presidents, José Sarney (1985–1990), Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2003), and Lula da Silva (2003–2010) enhanced this quest for autonomy. The last two presidents achieved this in a time of considerable shifts within the international system, which have placed Brazil as one among the few emerging global powers (Cepaluni and Vigevani 2012; Alden and Vieira 2005; Dauvergne and Farias 2012; Christensen 2013; Burges 2011). Hal Brands (2010) regards Lula's government as a turning point in terms of Brazilian foreign policy, with Lula's eight years in office being the period for forging what Brands (2010) calls the Brazilian "Grand Strategy." Its main objective has been to favor the emergence of a multipolar world in which international rules and institutions are more favorable to Brazilian interests. According to Brands (2010), Brazil pursued three policies in order to achieve this: first, a policy of soft-balancing against the US; secondly, a policy of forming coalitions to enhance Brazilian negotiating power; and thirdly, it designed a set of initiatives to assume a leading role in the process of South American integration.

Lula's government was characterized by greater participation in world debates and fora, with his foreign policy team exerting the so-called "active and assertive" diplomacy[3]. His foreign policy was also based on the South-South approach (Hirst et al. 2010) with the government deepening political and economic ties with African and Arab nations, as well as with China, not to mention South American countries. This, therefore, contributed to universalizing Brazil's foreign policy, among other things, in an attempt to counter the world's political asymmetry (Hirst et al. 2010). Following new directives, Brazil's foreign policy became more active in relation to issues which were not normally covered before, such as the Palestinian-Israeli affairs and the Iranian nuclear program imbroglio with the international community, stances that presented Brazil as a potential negotiator in matters of the "high politics" (Jesus 2011). Yet, despite the success in convincing the Iranians to negotiate a deal concerning their nuclear program, Brazil faced some restrictions while executing the new guidelines of its foreign policy. The behavior of countries such as the United States (Chatin 2016) has given indications of discontent towards Brazil's engagement in areas normally assigned to that country. Our main argument, based on documentation[4] and other official sources, points to the fact that Brazil's maneuvers in the case studied here were restrained by the United States mainly because of a conflict of interests.

(political realm), social justice and development (the economic realm) are a reality to the majority of people, the end of asymmetry in power structures, and the prevention and resolution of conflicts (security realm) are part of the international agenda (Hirst 2013).

[2] In this article, we use the concept of "global player" as defined by Cepaluni and Vigevani (2012); Alden and Vieira (2005); Dauvergne and Farias (2012) and Christensen (2013). These authors present Brazil as a middle power that has succeeded in the world arena by pursuing interests such as more symmetric power relations in areas such as economy, security, and "high politics."

[3] The terms "active and assertive," meant a more engaged foreign policy within issues that concerned emerging countries, the participation in world *fora* (World Trade Organization (WTO), BRICs etc.) and an assertive defense of Brazilian interests in the international scenario.

[4] We relied on Wikileaks Cables of official documents from the US government to sustain our main argument in this article. Although they were not made public by the US government, so far there has been no attempt to deny their veracity.

This article starts with a brief discussion about Brazil's actions in the Middle East, a strategic region in terms of projecting Brazil's interests and image of a "global player," and finalizes with an analysis of the Tehran Declaration and its aftermath, with the aim of illustrating the implications of the United States' rejection of the deal, in relation to Brazil's aspirations in the sphere of high politics.

Brazil in the Middle East

From March 14th–17th, 2010, President Lula and his diplomatic team visited Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories with the aim of becoming more active in the political affairs of the Middle East, once Brazilian relations with the region had been progressing from earlier dealings, primarily in the commercial arena. Two important outcomes[5] of Brazil's diplomacy from their new relations with the Middle East were Brazil's participation in the Annapolis Conference[6], and the creation of the Summit of South American-Arab Countries (SSAAC)[7].

During his travels, Lula criticized Israeli settlements, defended the creation of a Palestinian state, and proposed a dialogue with Iran regarding its nuclear program, which Israel disapproved. Alongside Mahmoud Abbas, the PNA president, Lula said that he dreamed of a Palestinian state where its inhabitants could live in peace with their brothers in the region (Casarões 2016). In fact, Brazil's intention in visiting Israel and the Palestinian territories was to engage in the mediation of the conflict, given that negotiations had come to a stall since 2008, especially after the Gaza Conflict of December that year. A document (Kubiske 2009)[8] from the American embassy in Brasilia interpreted the Brazilian initiative as a biased position against Israel, demonstrating an "unbalanced view" of the Middle East dynamics:

> Brazil's initial reaction [to the conflict] might have given reason for hope for a more balanced approach to Middle East peace issues if it had not been followed up by the usual one-sided posture of laying most of the blame on Israel and taking potshots at the U.S. for not doing more to stop Israel. The cliché-laden bromides of Brazilian

[5] Indeed, the stakes were high when it came to the organization of the first edition of the summit. According to a document from the American embassy in Brasilia, the state of Israel and the United States were concerned with Brazil's movements in the Middle East: Embassy Brasilia, Wikileaks Cable. "Israeli Embassy focused on Arab-South American Summit."Last modified March 2, 2005, http://wikileaks.rsf.org/cable/2005/03/05BRASILIA564.html.

[6] Brazil was invited to participate in this conference, which had the goal of advancing the negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. According to Celso Amorim (2011), the invitation was a result of Brazil's prestige at the time and willingness to cooperate as a new interlocutor for the cause. More information on: Jerusalem Media and Communication Center "Annapolis Conference." Last modified March 1, 2011, http://www.jmcc.org/fastfactspag.aspx?tname=62.

[7] The SSAAC is a forum to discuss subjects that are part of the reality of the two regions, such as fair trade, respect to international norms, the defense of the countries' national sovereignty, poverty reduction, the fight against hunger and human rights defense. Given the Middle East scenario of the post-Iraq invasion, the sanctions imposed by the US to the Syrian government and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, this fist summit (2005) had a more political character, with discussions centering around issues such as the right of defense, foreign interference, terrorism and a more active role of the emerging nations.

[8] Embassy Brasilia Wikileaks Cable. "Brazil: Laying Blame at the Feet of Israel, US for Attacks in Gaza." Last modified December 31, 2008, http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BRASILIA1685_a.html.

> officials are also indicative of a lack of real understanding of the Middle East that is troubling in a government that proposes to become involved (Kubiske 2008, 3).

Brazil's commitment to the Middle East was also shown by the recognition, in 2010, of the Palestinian state with the 1967 borders; after Brazil, almost every South American nation followed suit in recognizing the Palestinian statehood. The United States' administration did not hesitate to express[9] its concerns about Brazil's new way of dealing with the Middle East. Brazilian efforts in the region were regarded by a *Chargé D'Affairs* in the American Embassy in Brasilia, as naïve and without any notion of the reality involving Middle Eastern affairs[10]:

> Despite growing contacts and a small number of experts on the Middle East in the Itamaraty, the GOB [Government of Brazil] as a whole still does not fully grasp the regional and multilateral dynamics surrounding Iran and the Middle East, and its frenzied effort to reach out to all players in the region is increasing the potential for missteps and misunderstandings. We believe the GOB is misreading the views and actions of the United States and other key players on these issues, even as Brazil wades purposefully deeper into the Middle East (Kubiske 2009, 4).

The same diplomat also mentioned that Brazilian officials needed to be convinced to change their perspective to align it with US interests:

> As Brazil makes clear that it will continue to pursue a more active role in the Middle East, Mission [US representation] renews its request for a Washington regional expert to meet with senior counterpart officials about Iran and broader Middle East issues [...]. Additional USG [US government] engagement, perhaps in concert with Britain, France, and other key international players, will be needed to press our point of view and inform Brazil's (Kubiske 2009, 1).

In fact, the American government tried to disengage Brazil from its diplomatic presence in the Middle East, especially concerning the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, once the United States believed Brazil lacked the experience of the great players in dealing with the issue. Although Brazil did have some positive outcomes regarding its Middle Eastern engagement, mainly in the trade[11] arena, it could not go further as a mediator to the most intricate issue of the Arab World, since Washington (Chicola 2008)[12] would not allow an emerging country to enter a realm it saw as its own dominion. According

[9] Embassy Brasilia. Wikileaks Cable. "Scene Setter for the December 13-14 Visit WHA Assistant Secretary Arthuro Valenzuela." Last modified December 10, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BRASILIA1411_a.html.

[10] Embassy Brasilia. Wikileaks Cable. "Brazil on Ahmadinejad, Iran's Nuclear Program, and Visas." Last modified November 6, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BRASILIA1300_a.html.

[11] Between 2003 and 2009, almost the entire period of Lula's administration, Brazil's exports to the Middle East increased by 240%. Iran, for example, accounted for 35% of Brazil's total exports to the region. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, in the first quarter of 2010, Brazilian industries exported $2.3 billion dollars to the Arab countries, an increase of 24.6% in relation to the same period of 2009.

[12] Embassy Brasilia. Wikileaks Cable. "Brazil, Iran, Arab World, on Amorim's Mind in 2008." Last modified March 5, 2008, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/03/08BRASILIA304.html.

to Phil Chicola, Deputy Chief of Mission in the Brasilia Embassy, Celso Amorim's moves in the Middle East, especially after Brazil's participation in the Annapolis Conference, were seen as a negative step on behalf of Brazil's diplomacy, since the Brazilian Foreign Service "lacked" proper assets to assess the complex issues of the region. In his view, Brazilian diplomats were too enthusiastic about their work in the Middle East, often colliding with US' interests in this area of the world. In Chicola's words:

> Although Brazil often tilts uncomfortably towards the anti-US view of things in the Middle East (e.g. Amorim's recent criticisms of the U.S.) and engages in more wishful thinking than is warranted (e.g. Lula's assertion last year that Iran's nuclear program was not in violation of any international accord), they might be evincing some understanding that visible signals of evenhandedness are critical to remain a credible player. Avoiding a presidential level meeting between Ahmadinejad and Lula, at least in the short term, and undertaking a presidential visit to Israel in his third Middle East jaunt could be positive signals that Brazil understands its responsibility as a self-proclaimed neutral player in Mideast peace talks (Chicola 2008, 4).

To Phil Chicola, a Brazilian impartial stance regarding Middle Eastern affairs would mean engaging not with Iran but rather giving more attention to the relations with Israel; not to mention the fact that this position would also mean a harmonization with US interests in the region. In other words, the American official made clear in this document that in order to have a balanced view of Middle Eastern affairs, Brazil would have to be in line with American positions in this region. Indeed, Brazil's foreign policy formulators were the subject of another document[13] from the US government, in which the American ambassador Clifford M. Sobel detailed how his country perceived Brazil's diplomats and the way they formulated their country's diplomacy. According to the American ambassador, President Lula was not the principal architect of Brazil's foreign policy, with its formulation being the work of his "Three Foreign Ministers," Celso Amorim, described by the ambassador as the "Nationalist Leftist," Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães, "The Anti-American," and Marco Aurélio Garcia, "The Leftist."

Sobel considered Brazil's tough stance towards US' interests in the world political arena as a direct result of the work of Brazil's diplomats. In Sobel's own words: "the ideological forces currently dominating *Itamaraty* mean that, in the near term, the Foreign Ministry will continue to represent a "challenge" for US engagement on many issues."[14] The ambassador's statement seems to imply that Brazil had become an obstacle to their global interests. As a matter of fact, Brazil failed to reach the results it expected as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli affair, and, as shown in the Wikileaks Cables from the American Embassy in Brasília, there is reason to believe that

[13] Embassy Brasilia. Wikileaks Cable. "Understanding Brazil's Foreign Ministry Part 1: Ideological Forces." Last modified February 11, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BRASILIA177_a.html.

[14] Embassy Brasilia. Wikileaks Cable. "Understanding Brazil's Foreign Ministry Part 1: Ideological Forces." Last modified February 11, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BRASILIA177_a.html.

the United States were effectively not willing to support Brazil's maneuvers in the Middle East. Yet, Brazil went on with its pursuit of projection and got involved with the Iranian Nuclear issue

The Declaration of Tehran

In 2010, Brazil and Turkey mediated the Declaration of Tehran, a document which, among other clauses, required Iran's commitment concerning the transference of 1,200kg of low enriched uranium (LEU) to Turkey with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) stationing observers to monitor the storage. According to the agreement, after sending the stipulated amount as per the Tehran Declaration, the Vienna Group[15] would be responsible for the deposit of 120kg (10% of the total amount of LEU sent by Iran to Turkey) of the fuel required for the operation of the research reactor in Tehran in a period of up to one year. In addition, in order to be implemented, the swap deal had to have Iran's official commitment by sending a letter to the IAEA within seven days counting from May 17, which Iran promptly did[16], showing its compliance with the Tehran Declaration.

The Declaration of Tehran was an initiative designed by Lula and the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and was the first diplomatic effort since an earlier draft[17], made by the Vienna Group. One that did not succeed, although its proposal was very similar to the one reached by Brazil and Turkey. Turkey and Iran clearly contest for regional leadership in the Middle East; therefore, a peaceful solution for the Iranian Nuclear imbroglio would be preferable to a display of military force on the part of the Turks in order to settle the matter. Turkish efforts also relate to the creation of a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Free Zone[18] in the Middle East. Consequently, the Tehran Declaration was also an opportunity to cement a path of stability in a region marked by intense conflict.

Besides Brazil's intentions to contribute towards stability, the country also wanted to display its influence as a crafty diplomatic negotiator in world affairs (Chatin 2016) because of its pursuit of a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat and its elite's ambitions to play a role in major global issues (Jesus 2011; Muxagato 2010). Brazil's role[19] in nuclear disarmament initiatives has been an asset mainly because the country displays three strong means to achieving

[15] The United States, Russia, France and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

[16] In the words of the Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi to the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukiya Amano (pers. comm., 2010): "[…] we had constructive talks with respect to nuclear cooperation leading to the "'Joint Declaration by Iran, Turkey and Brazil on 17 May 2010." I hereby, officially present to Your Excellency a copy of the Joint Declaration. The Islamic republic of Iran reconfirms its agreement with the content of the Joint Declaration […]". This letter was sent on May the 24th https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nuclear-iran-letter/factbox-text-of-iran-letter-on-nuclear-fuel-swap-offer-idUSTRE64N3FA20100524

[17] In October 2009, the Vienna Group accepted a proposal made by the Director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed EL Baradei to have Iran swap LEU for nuclear fuel to the Iranian research reactor, roughly under the same terms of the proposal made by Brazil and Turkey. Although the draft was seen in a positive light by the members of the Vienna Group it was rejected by the Iranians and the negotiations had to start from scratch again.

[18] United Nations General Assembly.

[19] Carlo Patti (2010) makes a broad discussion on Brazil's engagement in nuclear issues in his work "Brazil and the nuclear issues in the years of the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva government (2003-2010)".

it, namely, through active leadership, through outreach to problematic states, and through a model constitution. Brazil is known as an active member of fora on nuclear disarmament such as the Conference on Disarmament, the 2005 NPT Review Conference, the International Panel on Fissile Materials, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), and the Missile Technology Control Regime. Brazil's presence in these platforms has added to its reputation as a respected player in the field of nuclear disarmament initiatives, which dates back to the 1960s when Brazil was the first country to advocate a nuclear-free zone in Latin America (Rublee 2010, Muxagato 2010). When it comes to Brazil's role regarding a nuclear-free world, its capacity to reach out to so-called problematic nations in the field of nuclear security is considered an asset, since Brazil's own historical background in nuclear energy development is an example of how a country can develop nuclear capability for civilian use without being tempted to explore its military side. From this perspective, it is understandable that Iran accepted Brazilian mediation in its imbroglio with the international community. Like Iran, Brazil has been very critical of Nuclear Weapon States (NWS), since they are the ones who advocate against other countries' nuclear facilities while possessing nuclear weapons themselves. Brazil's stance on this matter appeals to countries which do not want to relinquish their nuclear programs just because NWSs tells them to. The use of nuclear technology in many aspects of civilian life in the modern days - energy output or in medical research for instance - is essential to any nation. Brazil's role as a mediator in this issue can also be seen through the lenses of Brazilian interests in improving its relations with the Republic of Iran, not only concerning commercial ties but also political affairs (Muxagato 2010). One last asset underpinning Brazil's role in disarmament initiatives is its constitution, which defends a country free from any pursuit of nuclear technology for military purposes (Rublee 2010). This gives Brazil authority concerning representing other countries willing to pursue nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes too.

Whether we like it or not: Brazil in the Middle East[20]

Brazil's decision to enter the realm of Middle Eastern politics was seen as a negative step in Washington. The US ambassador Clifford M. Sobel, once again demonstrated his preoccupation with Brazil's growing participation in the Middle East, and its lack of consultation with the US in the matters concerning the region. Sobel called Brazil's diplomacy in the Middle East "clumsy," and alleged that Brazil's official statements were normally "unhelpful." The US ambassador was concerned about Brazil's maneuvers in the Middle East and described them as follows:

> Extreme GOB [government of Brazil] sensitivity to being seen as taking Washington's side has led to a consistent tendency to express sympathy toward countries in

[20] Title of one of the sections in a communication from the US embassy in Brasilia and released by the Wikileaks. Embassy Brasilia: Wikileaks Cable. "Constraining Iranian Influence in Brazil." Last modified July 1, 2008, http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BRASILIA896_a.html [Sobel 2008].

> Washington's crosshairs, such as Iran and Syria. These sympathies have provoked a number of statements and actions running counter to U.S. interests and sometimes contradicting long-held tenets of Brazil's foreign policy. […] Brazil's unhelpful positions and sometimes inaccurate statements with regard to the Middle East muddy the waters for U.S. policy and interests in the Middle East. Moreover, as an increasingly influential global player with aspirations to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, Brazil is seeking to use its new alliances, such as the IBSA forum (India, Brazil, South Africa) and the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), to exert leadership on issues outside the geographical confines of those groupings (Sobel 2008, 2).

The United States also disapproved of the growing presence of Iran in South America, as expressed by ambassador Sobel in a communication[21] to the US administration. According to the American ambassador, the real motive for Iran's engagement in Latin America was to undermine US presence in the region. Because of that, Sobel was also suspicious of Brazil's support for the Iranian nuclear program. This might explain the United States' negative response to the Tehran Declaration, soon after the Brazilian-Turkish swap deal was reached. As a response, and with the support of other members of the UNSC, the United States passed resolution 1929[22] imposing harsher sanctions on Iran because of its nuclear program, less than a month after the Tehran Declaration was signed. According to Celso Amorim (2017), the process to pass the resolution was a very unusual one, made in haste and without transparency, which confirmed his suspicions that the US had already decided to insist on the idea of forcing Iran into accepting its terms through coercion, even before the Brazilian-Turkish deal had been reached; Amorim also affirmed that the Tehran Declaration wasn't even discussed by the American government[23].

Actually, this hard stance has been a constant feature in the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton's statements before and after the Tehran Declaration was signed. Amorim himself acknowledged that she never meant to collaborate with the dialogue approach, but instead, kept pushing a different agenda. Amorim affirmed that, during telephone conversations with Clinton, she always maintained her views on more sanctions, never advocating the proposal for dialogue. Her position on the matter was described by him as follows:

> The unspecific nature of her criticisms, her return to arguments such as 'Iran can't be trusted', her insistent reiteration that the strategy of sanctions would not be altered: it all came together as an attitude that could be summarized as: 'I haven't read it [the Declaration]. But I don't like it' (Amorim 2017, 64).

[21] Embassy Brasilia. Wikileaks Cable. "Iranian Diplomacy Moves into High Gear." Last modified April 18, 2008, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/04/08BRASILIA526.html

[22] Security Council Imposes Additional Sanctions on Iran, Voting 12 in Favour to 2 Against, with 1 Abstention United Nations (2010)

[23] Amorim (2010).

Hillary Clinton's tough position was shared by other members of the US government, including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates[24], who appreciated Clinton's hawkish[25] way of doing politics. Nevertheless, their attitude distanced them from Barack Obama, who, weeks before Brazil and Turkey reached the agreement with Tehran reinforced his position of support for the two mediators by sending letters[26] to the Brazilian and Turkish leaders, inviting them to help him persuade Iran into negotiating. The letters presented what the Obama administration would consider important steps in order to get the channels opened for negotiation. After spending[27] time engaged with the Brazilian and Turkish leaders on the issue, the American president responded to his colleagues, stating: "I promised to respond *in detail* to your ideas. I have *carefully* considered our discussion, and I would like to offer a *detailed* explanation of *my* perspective and *suggest* a way ahead[28].

Obama's words to Celso Amorim (2017, 13) expressed his support for the Brazilian-Turkish initiative; he wrote: "we need friends who can talk with whom we cannot." The letter demonstrated Obama's[29] support for the points mentioned in the 2009 draft designed by Mohamed El Baradei, then Director General of the IAEA, and accepted by the Vienna Group. The President said that he agreed with Iran's request to use its Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) for medical purposes, saying that it would help "pave the way for a broader dialogue." He proceeded:

> I have viewed Iran's request as a clear and tangible opportunity to begin to build mutual trust and confidence, and thereby create time and space for a constructive diplomatic process. That is why the United States so strongly supported the proposal put forth by former International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General El Baradei. The IAEA's proposal was crafted to be fair and balanced, and for both sides to gain trust and confidence. For us, Iran's agreement to transfer 1,200 kg of Iran's low enriched uranium (LEU) out of the country would build confidence and reduce regional tensions by substantially reducing Iran's LEU stockpile. I want to underscore that this element is of fundamental importance for the United States. For Iran, it would receive the nuclear fuel requested to ensure continued operation of the TRR to produce needed medical isotopes and, by using its own material, Iran would begin to demonstrate peaceful nuclear intent. Notwithstanding Iran's continuing defiance of the United Nations Security Council resolutions mandating that it cease its enrichment of uranium, we were prepared to support and facilitate action on a proposal that would provide Iran nuclear fuel using uranium enriched by Iran — a demonstration of our willingness to be creative in pursuing a way to build mutual confidence (Obama 2009).

[24] "Iran's persistent failure to meet its international obligations and Iran's apparent lack of interest in pursuing negotiations require a clear response, including through appropriate measures" (Gates 2009).

[25] Landler (2016)

[26] On April 20, 2010, Obama sent a letter to President Lula da Silva explaining his views on a potential Iranian swap deal, asking Brazil's help in reaching it.

[27] There were some conversations between Obama and Brazilian officials during the years of the partnership of Lula-Amorim regarding a potential negotiation of a swap deal with Iran.

[28] MOVA (2016)

[29] www.voltairenet.org.

Obama's letter shows a "positive" attitude of the US President towards the contributions that Brazil could bring to the deadlock between Iran and the international community, with the American President "urging" Brazil to engage Iran in the negotiations. Prompted by Obama's encouragement, Brazil and Turkey brought Iran to negotiate with Iranian authorities after an extensive period of meetings. When the Obama administration rejected the proposal, Brazil and Turkey felt betrayed, as Celso Amorim puts it: "we got our fingers burned by doing things that "everybody" said was helpful and in the end we found that "some" people could not take "yes" for an answer[30]." Amorim's words are corroborated by President Lula[31], who also said, "I don't know if at that time some countries were "bothered" by the fact that countries like Brazil and Turkey, non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, achieved something that they themselves didn't" (Lula da Silva 2010). In fact, Brazil's attitude, acting as a mediator in the Iranian matter, was considered a major threat by some sectors of the United States' government with some seeing Brazil literally "crashing headlong"[32] with US interests.

Comparing Obama's words with El Baradei's statement[33] on the Tehran Declaration, taking into account that El Baradei wrote the 2009 draft that was praised by the American president in his letter, makes it clearer that US the rejection of the Turkish-Brazilian initiative was based on political grounds, once El Baradei used roughly the same language Obama did in saying that the proposal was a positive step[34]:

> I believe it's quite a good agreement. I don't know all the details. It depends on whether you want to see the glass as half full or half empty. I have been always saying that the only way to resolve the Iranian issue is to build trust. Moving 1,200, half, or at least more than half of the Iranian nuclear material out of Iran is a confidence-building measure; it would defuse the crisis and enable the US and the West [to gain] the space to negotiate. So, I hope that it would be perceived as a win-win situation. If we see — what I have been reading the last couple of days — that this is an "empty dressing," I think it is a wrong approach. I think there is no other way but to engage Iran, negotiate with Iran, and we have been waiting for this deal as a precursor for a full-scope negotiation. That is the only way to go in my view (Perelman 2010).

El Baradei's statement contrasts with the American negative attitude in admitting that two emerging powers were able to persuade Iran into negotiating through diplomacy. Since El Baradei, being an expert in the area, dealt with the Iranian issue personally, his words have weight in the recognition of the legitimacy of the Turkish-Brazilian proposal, therefore, making it even clearer that the United States' refusal of the swap deal was not based solely on technical reasons, but on

[30] Dombay and Wheatley (2010)

[31] Press statement by the President of the Republic, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, during the visit of the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Palácio *Itamaraty*, May 27, 2010.

[32] Barrionuevo (2009)

[33] Perelman (2010)

[34] Perelman (2010)

unwillingness to share power with emerging global players[35], thus revealing the contradictions within the Obama administration. While Obama showed interest in seeking Brazil and Turkey's support in order to bring Iran to the negotiation table, his government officials, mainly the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, presented a distinct way of dealing with the Iranian impasse. According to Celso Amorim:

> It was always clear to me that Hillary had her own political agenda. It was to become clearer as time went by that she had her own ideas on the Iranian nuclear issue, so perhaps in this particular situation she was subtly but deliberately diminishing the importance of what Obama had written. It was certainly the case that both Hillary and Obama expected Lula would fail in his efforts to influence Iran. But my impression in retrospect is that Hillary-unlike Obama- actually feared the possibility that Brazil and Turkey might succeed. […] The ideal outcome for the U.S. would have been to carry on pursuing the strategy of sanctions without any adverse effect on its bilateral relations with Brazil. To achieve that, Washington needed to convince us to abandon our efforts toward Iran. In the end, when it proved impossible to reconcile the two objectives, Washington chose to maintain its hard line on Iran to the detriment of its relationship with Brasilia (2017, 42).

Amorim's words are in line with what was said by other American officials such as the ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice[36], who, during the sessions to approve new sanctions against the Iranians, said: "Iran's choice remains clear; if it builds international confidence and respects its obligation we will reciprocate" (Rice 2010). She went on to say, "but if Iran refuses, its isolation will only grow; we will base our actions on Iran's degree of cooperation" (Rice 2010). What is striking in the ambassador's words is the contradiction that they carry, once she was implying that the Iranians were not cooperating with the international community in relation to its nuclear program, when the Iranians had just reached a deal that was rejected by the US and other major powers on a controversial basis. Contrary to what Rice stated, the swap deal presented a very interesting possibility of dialogue between Iran and the international community. Susan Rice, as other main figures of the Obama administration, was just expressing a view that was present[37] in the US government. The collision between Brazil's foreign policy and US interests was also highlighted by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's statement on Brazil's not very harmonious relations with her government[38]:

[35] On the very day of the Tehran Declaration announcement (May 17), the British newspaper The Guardian, ran an opinion piece praising the Turkish-Brazilian initiative and expressing America's unwillingness to cooperate apparently based on political grounds. In the words of Stephen Kinzer, 'Turkey and Brazil were once "near-automatic" supporters of Washington, but they have struck out on their "own" path. Distressed by what they saw as blundering American "unilateralism that destabilized" entire regions of the world, they have sought to "defuse" international confrontations and promote peaceful compromises instead. By felicitous coincidence, both are now nonpermanent members of the Security Council. This gave them special leverage over Iran. They have used it deftly'. Kinzer (2010)

[36] Al Jazeera English (2010).

[37] Embassy Brasilia. Wikileaks Cable. "Scene Setter for October 16-17 Visit of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William J. Burns." Last modified October 10, 2008, http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BRASILIA1356_a.html.

[38] Hillary Clinton (Interview) at Brooklyn Institute, May 27, 2010. State Department.

> Certainly, we have very serious disagreements with Brazil's diplomacy vis à vis Iran. We have told President Lula, I've told my counterpart the foreign minister that we think buying time for Iran enabling Iran to avoid the international unit with respect to their nuclear program makes the world more dangerous, they have a different perspective on what they see they're doing. What's the responsible position to take? If President Lula's foreign minister Amorim were sitting here they'd say 'we believe strongly that what we're doing will avoid conflict, it will avoid serious consequences inside Iran, sanctions are not a good tool', they have a theory of the case they're not just acting out of impulse, we disagree with that, so we go at it, so we say we don't agree with that, we think the Iranians were using you, we think it's time to go to the Security Council and only after the SC will the Iranians engage effectively in their nuclear program. But our disagreement doesn't in any way undermine our commitment to see Brazil as a friend and a partner in this hemisphere and beyond (pers. comm. Hillary Clinton May 27, 2010).

From Hillary's words, the US friendship with Brazil has room to thrive, but only if it does not involve Brazilian presence as a "global player," moving into realms usually assigned to the Americans and other major powers. Celso Amorim explains the possible reason why the American government rejected Brazil and Turkey's proposal[39]:

> [...] Issues related to international peace and security – some might say the "hard core" of global politics – remain the exclusive territory of a small group of countries. The fact that Brazil and Turkey ventured into a subject that would be typically handled by the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany) – and, more importantly, were successful in doing so – disturbed the status quo. The insistence on sanctions against Iran – effectively ignoring the Declaration of Tehran, and without even giving Iran time to respond to the comments of the "Vienna Group" (the U.S., France and Russia) – confirmed the opinions of many analysts who claimed that the traditional centers of power will not share gladly their privileged status. Indeed, the negotiations conducted by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey followed precisely the script that had been on the table for some months and whose validity had been recently reaffirmed at the highest level (Amorim 2010).

Amorim's lines confirm the United States' concerns not only with Brazil's increasing global power status but also with its relations with Iran, two things the major sectors within the American government would not tolerate[40]. In fact, the US response to the Tehran Declaration was already expected, given

[39] Amorim (2010)

[40] It was clear that the US, along with France and Great Britain, did not know how to deal with the fact that two emerging countries were successful in achieving, through diplomacy, what they failed to achieve through coercion. The Tehran initiative was very critical and showed that it was possible to have Iran negotiating without resorting to sanctions, even though, sanctions followed the signature of the deal, which demonstrates that emerging nations being successful in negotiations does not mean political acceptance by the major players. This only shows the asymmetry in power relations in the world stage and that that needs to be changed in order to open the political arena to new powers. The US administration was 'jealous' of Brazil and Turkey's achievement and resolved to undermine its mediation by moving forward with a campaign to diminish their efforts on the Media and pushing for new sanctions against Iran. The US did not expect two emerging countries

the views expressed by American officials in another document (Sobel 2008)[41] from the US embassy in Brasilia. Among other things, the communication addressed Brazil's foreign policy and how it was clashing with the US already before the Obama administration. Classifying Brazil's foreign policy as "hesitant" in the global arena, the American ambassador Clifford M. Sobel refers to the Brazilian diplomacy as follows:

> Brazil's foreign policy is dominated by symbolic steps to burnish its South-South credentials and status as an emerging leader, rather than by resolute attention to core political and economic interests, including strengthening bilateral political and trade relations with the United States. The attainment of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council has been a central tenet of Brazil's foreign policy under President Lula da Silva's government, and most of its actions on the international stage are geared toward that goal. However, Brazil has largely failed to assume the international leadership role that would make it a strong candidate for such a position (Sobel 2008, 2).

Brazil's position as a potential candidate to a UNSC seat was not seen in good light by the Americans, and naturally, its initiatives in the realm of "high politics" would not be tolerated by the superpower. From this perspective, the US' rejection of the Tehran Declaration can be seen as a two-fold strategy on the part of the American government. First, as a counterattack against the intentions of emerging powers to gain a more active role in the "high politics" arena, and second as a way to fight back the Iranian Republic once it has been America's first and foremost opponent in the Middle East. As a matter of fact, Iran and the US have been waging a new Cold War in the region and the Iranian Nuclear Program has been the issue *par excellence* in terms of disagreement between the two countries. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that by discrediting the Tehran Declaration, the US was not only stopping Iran from acting independently regarding its nuclear program, but also presenting its stance concerning the involvement of new powers in complex global issues (Leverett 2013). Although the rejection by the US and its allies of Brazil's efforts in the Tehran Declaration is seen as Brazil's inability to "graduate" as an emerging country with an active voice on the world stage (Milani et al. 2017), it is more reasonable to believe that this was not the case, and that the American attitude was more about its unwillingness to accept middle powers as active negotiators in high politics (Jesus 2011; Muxagato 2010).

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to successfully bring Iran to the negotiating table and ended up discarding a good deal that could have been positive to engage Iran on a peaceful relation with the international community on political basis, not because of any inadequacy that the agreement might imply. "The US 'Betrayed' Brazil and Turkey, and France and Great Britain were 'jealous', says the author on a book about Iran". BBC Brazil, April 18, 2012. http://www.bbc.com/portuguese (accessed July 7, 2017); "US underestimate Brazil and Turkey's Diplomacy, says book about the new deal with Iran". BBC Brazil, April 18, 2012. http://www.bbc.com/portuguese (accessed July 7, 2017). Parsi's comments are corroborated by Celso Amorim's words, who said that getting the deal was Brazil and Turkey's 'main mistake, actually. That was not the idea. The idea was to prove that Iran was not reliable […] and not to have the agreement'. Amorim, Celso. Interview at the Starr Forum [video], MIT Center for International Studies, April 18, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RMXSzYHYFQ&feature=youtu.be (accessed July 07, 2017). His words are in line with Hillary Clinton's affirmation that the agreement would fail, according to a New York Times article: Barrionuevo, Alexei, and Arsu Sebnem. "Brazil and Turkey Near Nuclear Deal with Iran", May 16, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com (accessed July 07, 2017)

[41] Embassy Brasilia. Wikileaks Cable. "Scene setter for Policy Planning Director Gordon." Last modified April 4, 2008, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/04/08BRASILIA469.html.

Conclusions

Brazil's incursions in the Middle East demonstrate the country's interest in engaging with political issues in that region in a brand-new way, and it is the result of its core convictions as a middle power with global political aspirations. From this perspective, the Middle East seemed to be an interesting area for Brazil to exert its prerogatives on the world stage, given the nature of the region. One of the reasons for Brazil's presence in the Arab World was the country's aspiration for a seat at the UNSC and its ambition to become a new voice internationally. Therefore, the Iranian imbroglio fitted perfectly in Brazil's plans.

Brazil's mediation in the Tehran Declaration can be considered the first and probably the only endeavor of such caliber ever to occur in the country's diplomatic history, thus being its most significant involvement in Middle Eastern politics to date. Brazil's growing presence in the Middle East and its relations with Iran show that the country's foreign policy posed a challenge to US interests in the region. As a result, the US government tried to contain Brazil's steps regarding the politics of the Arab World and the nuclear proliferation field. The US did that according to its means; in some cases, by coopting allies inside the Brazilian government, and in others, by trying to convince Brazilian authorities and public opinion of favoring American interests. Since the US government failed to convince Brazil into changing its diplomacy, it tried to stop Brazil in high instances whenever it was possible, like the UNSC, where Brazil would certainly be in disadvantage in terms of political capital. This was exemplified by the fact that, even after voting against resolution 1929, as Turkey did, Brazil did not manage to impede other UNSC members from voting in favor of new sanctions against Iran.

The United States' position on the Turkish-Brazilian-Iranian affair illustrated a divide in the American "decision-making cabinet" exemplified by Obama's attitude of recruiting two emerging powers to help him make Iran negotiate, while his Secretary of State, apace with other members of his government, maintained a tough stance on the matter. A possible reason to explain the United States' reaction in the aftermath of the Tehran Declaration is the fact that the US was playing a double-game, reaching out to the Turkish and Brazilian leaders, while maintaining the idea of going on with sanctions. From this perspective, Obamas' letters could be seen as a "bluff," since his proposal was not in accordance with US government officials and with Obama himself, who said on different occasions that his administration would push forward with sanctions against Iran. In other words, the letters might have been written to show Obama's supposed willingness to negotiate, while expecting Brazil and Turkey would fail in negotiating a deal with the Iranians. If that was the point, Obama overlooked the fact that it would be easier for the Iranians to trust two countries with similar backgrounds rather than going with the great powers whose approach had been the same: political and economic coercion in order for Iran to surrender into negotiating; and that was exactly what happened, with the Iranians accepting a deal that was much of the same as the previous one proposed by the IAEA and the Vienna Group. In fact, more than ever, the US-backed rejection by the UNSC of the Tehran Declaration on political basis demonstrates that the great powers continue to call the shots on the world stage.

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