

Striving for Seriousness

Brazil's Inclusion and Exclusion from the World Order



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INTRODUCTION

Unlike other significant actors in the Global South, the genesis of Brazil's grievances is not principally the country's colonial past, but rather its presence at the founding of the rules-based international order. In other words, Brazil is motivated less by mistreatment than by a sense of not being given its due. In 1942, Brazil officially entered World War II on the side of the Allied powers, serving as the only independent country in South America to join the war effort. Perhaps most notably, Brazil deployed a significant expeditionary force to the Italian campaign: a force which numbered around 25,000 soldiers directly under U.S. command.¹

However, Brazil's expeditionary force deployed on the Italian front in September 1944 and left in May 1945—arriving too late and heading home too early. As a result, Brazil did not secure a significant role for itself in the formation of the postwar international order. This ran counter to Brazilian expectations—and, it should be noted, to American promises. At a meeting in February 1943 between Franklin D. Roosevelt and President Getúlio Vargas in Natal, the U.S. president told his Brazilian counterpart that he wanted him at his side during the postwar settlements to reorganize the world.² Instead, Brazil did not play a large role in the

postwar peace conference or in the founding of the Bretton Woods institutions. The spoils that were to accrue to Brazil from fighting on the right side failed to materialize.

Brazil sees itself as a Western country with Western institutions. And yet, from its point of view, it has been excluded from most global leadership roles in the rules-based international order underpinned by Western power and constructed after World War II. Brazil's foreign policy is thus motivated by the desire to right the wrongs from this postwar moment and achieve its due on the international stage. Foundational to this approach is Brazil's diplomatic north star: reforming the United Nations and achieving a coveted permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC). Brazil has seen a long string of disappointments on this front: After failing to secure a permanent seat on the Council of the League of Nations or a seat on the UNSC shortly after its formation in 1945, its current campaign to get a seat at the table has been running since at least the early 1990s.³ More recently, serving as a founding member of the BRICS grouping—an organization often lacking a *raison d'être* but meant to herald the arrival of the Global South—has provided further ballast to Brazil's efforts.

Behind this drive and the self-assured flexing of its diplomatic muscles is Brasília's deep-seated sense of insecurity.

ity. Brazil does not take kindly to perceived slights to its prestige or status as a globally relevant power. For much of its modern history, Brazil has been a continental power searching for a higher place in world affairs while harboring a deep sense of grievance about not receiving its due in the international system.

In a story that is likely apocryphal, in 1964 following a nasty dispute between France and Brazil over fishing rights near the two countries' shared maritime border at French Guiana, French president Charles de Gaulle allegedly stormed out of the room, muttering under his breath that "Brazil is not a serious country."⁴ The veracity of this story notwithstanding, "le Brésil n'est pas un pays sérieux" has managed to bore itself deep into the Brazilian national psyche. The scars of not being taken seriously, especially by great powers like the United States, are evident in Brazil's foreign policy strategy and pursuits. "Brazil is the country of the future—and always will be," goes a common refrain meant to illuminate the yawning gap between the country's potential and its reality. In September 2013, a front-page story in *The Economist* on Brazil's troubles blared: "Has Brazil blown it?," painting a picture of Brazil yearning to become a "serious country" with global ambitions yet frustrated by repeated setbacks.⁵

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Although foreign policy preferences may change depending on where a Brazilian president is on the political spectrum, an elite consensus exists in Brazil regarding the country's place in the global order. In this worldview, Brazil is uniquely situated to lead in an increasingly multipolar world. Brazil is cast simultaneously as an inheritor of Western liberal international values and a champion among the countries of the Global South, a steadfast leader within its region (despite being culturally and linguistically distinct

from most Spanish-speaking nations) and a respected voice on the global stage. This belief, in turn, guides the multitudinous ways in which Brazil seeks to demonstrate its "seriousness" in world politics. Serious countries consolidate and uphold global norms; Brazil led the way in preventing an arms race in the Southern Cone, negotiating the Guadalajara Agreement with Argentina and consolidating a norm of South America remaining a zone free of nuclear weapons.⁶ Serious countries provide global public goods and solve complex challenges with deft diplomacy; Brazil has solved border disputes in South America and attempted to negotiate an end to Iran's nuclear weapons program by proposing the transfer of fissile material to Turkey (a proposal that the United States rejected).⁷ And serious countries maintain attractive values and have a concern for their image in the world; in the space of two years, Brazil hosted two of the most well-known cultural and sporting events, the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games, for which Brazil had lobbied extensively as a sign of its growing international clout. Today, Brazil's cultural attraction and soft power remain undeniable.⁸

VISIONS OF GLOBAL ORDER

More than anything, Brazil desires a more equitable share of power globally. After decades of feeling second-rate to other Western powers, it strives to create a world defined by benign multipolarity.⁹ Brazil rankles at U.S. unipolarity, summed up by the words of two analysts: "Brazil does not need the US to 'lead the world.' It needs the US to find a new place at the table."¹⁰

Part of Brazil's vision therefore includes restructuring the "table" by reforming key international institutions to encourage a more equitable distribution of power and influence. Top priorities for Brazil include expanding the UNSC and reforming international financial institutions, as well as discouraging unilateral actions in favor of utilizing the UN framework as a tool for global peace and prosperity. If Brazil can achieve these goals, it believes that the voices of China, India, and developing countries in the Global South—itsself included—will have a greater impact in the international arena and will be able to advocate for more equitable and less Western-centric solutions to global problems.

Brazil has long advocated for UNSC reform, believing that the institutions established in the wake of World War II are deeply biased and non-inclusive. In 2005, Brazil, along with Germany, India, and Japan, presented a reform to the

UNSC largely modeled as a spiritual successor to the council's expansion in 1965.¹¹ Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized that the UNSC represented 22 percent of the United Nation's member states in 1945, while it only represented 7.7 percent in 2005 (and even less today). For that reason, Brazil proposed expanding the council from 15 to 25 members, 6 of whom would be permanent while the other added 4 would be non-permanent and occupied on a rotating basis. Furthermore, the plan calls for greater geographic diversity, with two permanent seats assigned to Africa and Asia each and one assigned to Western Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), while Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and LAC would also receive one non-permanent seat each. In addition, the proposal discusses the removal of absolute veto power from the permanent members to create a more responsive and effective UNSC.

Brazil lauds multilateral cooperation while lambasting unilateral acts, be they military actions or something as simple as individual sanctions. Brazil takes as axiomatic that multilateral action is always better than unilateral solutions. It sees the United Nations as the bedrock of a more democratic, multipolar world and strongly supports international decisionmaking. This policy stance often finds itself in conflict with the unilateral nature of many U.S. actions. It was also challenged by former President Jair Bolsonaro's "Brazil above everything" philosophy, which represented a countercurrent to the country's tradition of multilateralism. Under Bolsonaro, Brazil retrenched from both regional and global roles, exiting the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and undermining Brazil's international prestige in the eyes of traditionalists through his willingness to align rhetorically with the Trump administration.¹² The election of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was accompanied by a flurry of enthusiasm by traditionalists for Brazil to "return" to its traditional role in international politics, with one piece going so far as to proclaim: "Brazil is back from the dead."¹³

Following a trip to Cuba in September 2023, Lula denounced the U.S. embargo on the island as illegal and decried the nation's inclusion on the United States' list of state sponsors of terrorism.¹⁴ Additionally, Brazil's staunch support for peaceful conflict resolution led it to vote against the implementation of sanctions on Iran in 2010, asserting that sanctions would only cause more suffering and could spiral into a conflict, as evidenced by the Iraq War.¹⁵ Similarly, appalled by the destabilizing UN intervention

in Libya, Brazil proposed modifying the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle to Responsibility While Protecting (RWP).¹⁶ With RWP, Brazil aimed to establish a new doctrine that provided a more balanced approach to protecting populations while maintaining respect for state sovereignty and international norms, in order to ensure more accountable and proportionate civilian protection interventions.

Brazil also sees peacebuilding as central to its foreign policy and vision for an international order. Indeed, alongside its commitment to multilateralism, Brazilian foreign policy prides itself on a belief that Brazil can serve as a credible interlocutor between countries of all stripes—an attitude that was on full display in Lula's 2023 inauguration speech, where he called on Brazil to "resume relations with all the countries of the world."¹⁷ However, this unrelenting search for peace sometimes brings Brazil into contention with global norms surrounding the creation of a just peace. Recently, as chair of the UNSC, Brazil formally proposed a ceasefire resolution for the Gaza conflict. However, this effort was vetoed by the United States due to the lack of language regarding Israel's right to self-defense. Additionally, immediately before Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement that he is open to peace talks with Ukraine as long as Russia maintains control of the territory it currently occupies, Brazil and China arrived at a series of "common understandings" for a political settlement of the war.¹⁸ Brazil's stance on Ukraine clearly demonstrates its preference for peace of any kind rather than a peace that reinforces the norms inherent to the rules-based order and that reaffirms a nation's right to territorial integrity.

While Brazil may find like-minded countries in Latin America, its vision for a more multilateral world order may be overshadowed by its lack of leadership on critical issues.¹⁹ Additionally, Lula's ascription of equal blame to Russia and Ukraine for Russia's invasion firmly aligns it with the authoritarian powers of Russia and China—nations that most seek to undermine the current rules-based order and do not share the same deep-rooted democratic values as Brazil.²⁰ However, this tracks with Brazil's desire to diminish the control that the United States and the West have over the global order, under the belief that anything done to undermine Western dominance of the world order must be a positive step toward a more inclusive, multilateral international community. One might call this the fallacy of the false alternative, where most choices are evaluated against a utopian ideal.

While some of Brazil's goals seem unattainable and others appear to negatively affect the current, fragile order drafted almost 80 years ago, Brazil has firmly established itself as a leader in the Global South. Brazil sees itself as a bridge between the old Western powers and new, more diverse powers.²¹ The centerpiece of this vision—and of Brazilian foreign policy as a whole—is the idea that, before becoming a world power, Brazil must first act as a leader in its region.²² Its leadership in creating MERCOSUR, the South American trade bloc, demonstrates its strong desire to use trade as a peacebuilding and development mechanism, mollifying its long-held rivalry with Argentina and expanding economic opportunities for the region. However, not all of its initiatives have been successful. In 2008, Brazil helped launch the now-defunct Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) with the goal of promoting regional integration and fostering economic development and political stability while serving as a balance to U.S. power.²³ However, due to the influence of Venezuela and political infighting, Brazil, along with six other member states, suspended membership in 2019.²⁴ The Brazilian government officially rejoined UNASUR in 2023 in an attempt to encourage a resurgence of multilateral cooperation in its home region, but other regional actions have been less than enthusiastic.²⁵ Before doing so, Brazil held a regional leadership summit in Brasília in which Lula pitched his ideas of regional stability and the creation of a regional currency to rival the U.S. dollar.²⁶ However, these talks were overshadowed by Lula's effusive praise for Venezuela's authoritarian leader, Nicolás Maduro.

ECONOMICS

Brazil's economy is, and has been, dominated by commodity exports. From its initial role as a coffee-producing powerhouse to its emergence on the global economic stage as a leading rubber producer, Brazil's economic growth through much of the twentieth century pursued an export-substitution model with mixed results. Such a model promises to bootstrap resource-rich countries into industrialization by exporting raw materials in exchange for finished goods, an approach subscribed to by many Latin American countries during this period. While Brazil's economy liberalized and opened slightly in the 1990s, it is still considered one of the most closed economies in Latin America, with most of Brazil's exports concentrated in energy and agriculture today. Brazil is the world's larg-

est soybean producer, accounting for nearly 40 percent of global production.²⁷ Meanwhile, state-owned oil firm Petrobras has seen consistent growth in production, even under the more environmentally minded Lula administration.²⁸ In some models, Brazil is set to be a top-five oil producer later this century.

A common thread running through Brazilian economic policy is a sense that the country's resource wealth has yet to be translated into a greater share of global value chains.

This is not to say that manufacturing and services are absent from Brazil's economic story. To the contrary, the country has seen a rapid expansion in its digital economy and is home to the largest number of "unicorn" technology startups, valued at over \$1 billion, in Latin America.²⁹ In an earlier period, when Brazil was ruled by a military regime (1965-1985), it experienced rapid industrialization, which economists refer to as "the Brazilian economic miracle." Nevertheless, a common thread running through Brazilian economic policy is a sense that the country's resource wealth has yet to be translated into a greater share of global value chains.

This attitude has manifested across political alignments and administrations. Bolsonaro, for instance, championed niobium—a key metal for advanced aerospace and steel manufacturing—as an avenue to jump-start the Brazilian economy. Brazil is responsible for 91 percent of global niobium production, a feature the former president highlighted on a trip to Japan, where he wore a custom niobium medalion while proclaiming his desire to create a "Niobium Valley" in Brazil to rival Silicon Valley in the United States.³⁰ How exactly Bolsonaro intended to transform Brazil's niobium industry—an offshoot of the broader mining sector concentrated on raw mineral extraction and initial processing—into an emerging technology titan was never elaborated upon. The sentiment, however, was clear: Brazil has what other countries want, and consequently, Brazil deserves to play a more prominent role in the global economy.

Brazil's efforts to climb these value chains have been complicated by the sheer diversity of interests and stake-

holders at play in its economy. While Brazil is an open, market-based economy on paper, it is home to a fluctuating array of state, private sector, and international interests. State-owned enterprises dominate in most sectors, including banking, energy generation, and oil and gas exploration, but they coexist with foreign actors in a few others, such as the mining sector, where multinational corporations have established a foothold and even Brazilian firms like Vale have successfully internationalized. Finally, powerful domestic agricultural lobbies wield considerable power over Brazilian politics, in turn shaping Brazil's approach to international trade and economic relations.

The result of this dynamic array of interests and stakeholders is the creation of a tangled web of regulations, laws, and political horse trading collectively known as the *custo Brasil*—the cost of doing business in Brazil.³¹ Economist Matthew Taylor has deemed this “decadent developmentalism,” wherein domestic economic interest groups continuously push for self-serving protectionist regulations, creating negative feedback loops which simultaneously raise the cost of doing business while exacerbating pressure on the state to compensate for sluggish growth and raising the costs of reforms.³² This hidden cost has frustrated Brazil's efforts to grow its share of the value-added manufacturing sector and lessen its dependency on international commodities markets.

One actor which has proven remarkably proficient at navigating the *custo Brasil* is China. China serves as the primary export destination for Brazilian oil, minerals, and agricultural products, while Brazil is the second-largest recipient of Chinese development finance in the Western Hemisphere (behind only Venezuela) and one of the largest recipients of Chinese foreign direct investment globally.³³ Beijing has successfully parleyed this economic influence into a greater openness to Chinese firms, including telecommunications giant Huawei and automaker BYD.³⁴ The latter offer, in particular, has marked appeal to Brazil's vision of a world where it is not merely the source of raw materials but also an important contributor to global value chains.

Beyond U.S.-China competition, Brazil is actively pursuing an expanded role for itself in multilateral economic fora. Accession to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for instance, was a goal of the Bolsonaro government, though it has been stymied thus far by calls to reduce corruption and lower the cost of doing business.³⁵ Joining the OECD does not fit comfortably within Lula's administration, since the coun-

try's Worker's Party is often skeptical of organizations seen as “rich country groupings.” The country will likely use its hosting of the G20 platform later this year to build some momentum toward its accession to the OECD, meanwhile pushing for other initiatives such as a global billionaires' tax of 2 percent to lower inequality. President Lula, for his part, has cautiously advanced Brazil as an observer member of OPEC+, though in his words this is strictly to “convince people that a part of the money made from oil should be invested for us to nullify oil, creating alternatives.”³⁶ Finally, Brazil's status as a founding member of BRICS is a point of particular pride as an ostensibly Global South-led grouping whose origins do not lie with the post-World War II international order. Critically, however, Brazil does not necessarily see BRICS as a means of advancing a wholly separate global order (as some of its members do) but instead seeks to use the grouping in conjunction with other multilateral bodies to increase Brazil's power and prestige, practically advance economic and trade goals, and ensure diplomatic space with other rising powers. The recent entrants into the BRICS+ grouping, especially the more problematic and autocratic powers such as Iran, may lead Brazil to “lean away” from BRICS in order to confirm its democratic credentials with Washington and the West.

GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Brazil approaches great power competition as a balancing act between the United States, China, and, to a much lesser extent, Russia.³⁷ In this equation, Brazil believes the United States, as the established power, needs to learn to step back from its role at the head of the international order and accommodate the rise of other powers. China, as the emerging power, should be welcomed into the fold and given the opportunity to prove itself as a responsible actor through increased multilateral cooperation. Mediating between these two is Brazil, which, by virtue of its position at the crossroads of the traditional “Western world” and the burgeoning Global South, is uniquely situated to play the role of interlocutor. Russia, it should be noted, is treated like a normal global power capable of helping Brazil balance against the United States. Unlike the United States, Brazil would not like to see Russia weakened significantly as a result of the war in Ukraine.

Brazil has built intellectual scaffolding for this policy position (i.e., that of so-called non-alignment or neutrality). In practice, Brazil has sought to get the best of both worlds

by partnering with China on economic development and infrastructure initiatives while retaining its ties to the United States when it comes to traditional areas of convergence like counternarcotics and military-to-military cooperation.

Over Lula's first two terms, the China-Brazil relationship expanded dramatically. Chinese firms have cemented themselves in Brazil's physical and digital infrastructure, including helping to construct a fiber-optic cable from Fortaleza to Kribi, providing the largest data transmission capacity between Africa and South America. China is building and financing the Salvador SkyRail line in São Paulo, creating railroad networks in the Amazon, and expanding public transportation nationwide.³⁸ China and Brazil have also established partnerships for scientific research, while Brazil boasts nearly a dozen Confucius Institutes promoting closer academic and cultural ties between the two countries.³⁹ China-Brazil relations have appeared relatively stable over the past two decades, owing largely to the criticality of the trade relationship between them.

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Notably, Bolsonaro irked China on the campaign trail with a trip to Taiwan, as well as by claiming that “China is not buying in Brazil; it is buying Brazil.” However, upon assuming power, Bolsonaro quickly discovered that pursuing a confrontational policy toward Beijing is unsustainable, especially in the face of strong pressure from the agricultural industry, which relies on China as its primary export market.⁴⁰ Lula, for his part, has sought to pick up where his predecessor left off in cultivating closer ties between Beijing and Brasília. During his April 2023 state visit to

Beijing (and on the heels of a visit to Washington), Lula reaffirmed Brazil's commitment to partnering with China, telling Chinese President Xi Jinping: “Our relationship with China is extraordinary, and it has become more mature and stronger over time. . . . We hope that Brazil-China relations are able to go beyond trade. Nobody can stop Brazil from continuing to develop its relationship with China.”⁴¹

While Brazil and China have cultivated close economic ties, Brazil has sought to moderate Beijing's influence in important ways. Until recently, Brazil did not seek to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), although there are rumors that the Lula administration will sign a memorandum of understanding regarding the effort at the G20 in November. Unlike other large Latin American holdouts to the BRI like Mexico and Colombia, Brazil does not enjoy a free trade agreement with the United States. Brazil has furthermore consistently demurred over Chinese efforts to establish a direct government-to-government line of credit between Beijing and Brasília.⁴² Having seen how thoroughly China's funding line ensnared neighboring Argentina, Brazil appears determined to preserve its fiscal independence even as trade and foreign direct investment flows continue to grow, thus far refusing China's overtures to establish a direct sovereign credit line.

One area where China's advances have met with limited progress is the defense sector, where the Brazilian armed forces continue to regard the United States as their partner of choice. Under Bolsonaro, Brazil was inaugurated as a U.S. major non-NATO ally, making it one of only three countries in Latin America to bear this distinction.⁴³ Most recently, the aircraft carrier USS George Washington docked in Rio de Janeiro following a joint exercise with regional navies.⁴⁴ While China has made some strides in the defense sector, for instance, sending personnel to train at the Brazilian jungle warfare school and Peacekeeping Operations Joint Training Center, cooperation along this axis remains limited.⁴⁵ This promises new challenges for Brazilian foreign policy, with the armed forces looking north to the United States and NATO for their force modernization plans while the country's foreign policy establishment seeks to encourage greater South-South cooperation.

How sustainable Brazil's balancing act will be over the long term remains in question, and there are already signs that it may be fracturing. For example, Brazil has been caught in the crossfire of the Washington-Beijing rivalry in the case of telecommunications. After Brazil banned

Huawei from competing in the country's first 5G spectrum auction, China responded by threatening to withhold Covid-19 vaccines.⁴⁶ It further threatened enhanced phytosanitary checks against Brazilian agricultural exports, ensuring that all three of Brazil's agricultural lobby groups became mouthpieces for Huawei. Faced with foreclosing badly needed pandemic relief, Brazil reneged, but the incident underscored the difficulty of accurately assessing what the United States and China view as strategic interests and red lines. Brazil's ability to pursue increased economic and trade ties with Beijing while retaining diplomatic and security relations with the United States may prove increasingly difficult to maintain as great power tensions persist.

RECENT ACTIONS

The Lula administration has eagerly embraced the opportunity to restore Brazil's reputation for multilateralism and leadership at both the global and regional levels. To be a leader of the Global South, Brazil recognizes that it must develop and maintain better relations with African and Asian countries.⁴⁷ Many of its recent actions demonstrate its desire to expand its role. While initially hesitant, Brazil endorsed the expansion of the BRICS platform, which culminated in the admission of four new members. Argentina's rejection of the offer means that Brazil remains the only Western Hemisphere member of the newly christened BRICS+, but the entry of new members may yet help Brazil's push for multilateralism by diluting the weight of China and Russia within the grouping.⁴⁸ In August 2023, Lula participated in the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries summit along with eight other developing countries from Africa and Southeast Asia to encourage cooperation on food and nutritional security as well as the creation of human rights networks and the implementation of diplomat training programs.⁴⁹

Furthermore, Brazil—home to the world's largest rainforest—finds itself closely aligned with countries like Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on environmental issues. In May 2023, Lula met with Indonesian President Joko Widodo to discuss the preservation of the world's tropical forests as well as the two countries' trade balance and shared positions on the war in Ukraine.⁵⁰ Closer to home, Brazil held the first Amazon Summit in Belem, a landmark conference that encourages cooperation among eight South American nations to facilitate

sustainable and inclusive development.⁵¹ In addition to its work on environmental issues, Brazil has aligned itself with the Global South in the fight against wealth inequality. In June 2023, Lula publicly blamed rich countries for the environmental crisis facing the world, emphasizing that “it was not the African people who polluted the world. It was not the Latin American people who polluted the world,” but rather those who carried out the Industrial Revolution, and that therefore they should be the ones to pay.⁵² Following devastating floods in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in 2024, which left over 100 dead and hundreds of thousands displaced, Lula issued new calls for international support toward mitigating the impacts of climate change, though the response to date to this incident has been primarily driven by Brazilian government resources.⁵³

Brazil's strong insistence that world powers do their part does not come without Brazil making its own efforts, however. In South America and the broader world, Brazil seeks to act as a peacemaker and share the burden of the traditional powers. At least locally, Brazil appears ready to support its neighbors to guarantee peace. As Venezuela continues its military buildup, threatening Guyana and ending the respite from interstate conflict that South America has experienced since the 1990s, Brazil has called for calmness and restraint over the Essequibo border dispute.⁵⁴ To demonstrate that it would be willing to enforce peace, Brazil reinforced its border with Venezuela after Venezuela refused to back down.⁵⁵ This goes against the Brazilian policy of peace at all costs, as seen in Ukraine and Gaza, which it has supported since the onset of the two conflicts. Lula went to great lengths to advocate for peace in Ukraine, meeting with President Zelensky in September 2023 and offering to serve as a conduit for negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. By contrast, Brazil's efforts in Gaza have been less fruitful. After the rejection of its proposed ceasefire in the UNSC, the war expanded, prompting Lula to recall his ambassador from Israel.⁵⁶

Most recently, Brazil has sought to shepherd a bloc of left-leaning governments in responding to the fraud and subsequent crisis that followed Venezuela's presidential elections on July 28, 2024. Notably, Brazil has yet to recognize Maduro as the victor of the elections, and it has been marshaling support among other regional heavyweights like Colombia and Mexico in seeking a mediated solution, including potentially a redo of the election. This suggestion was heavily criticized by the Venezuelan opposition.⁵⁷ How-

ever, Brazil's credibility as a regional authority may be challenged by its approach to Venezuela. On August 16, 2024, a grouping of over 20 Western Hemisphere and European countries, led by the Dominican Republic and Panama, signed a joint statement condemning apparent fraud in Venezuela's elections and demanding a release of citizens detained in the subsequent protests that broke out across the country.⁵⁸ Rather than acting as a mediator, Brazil found itself sidelined by a coalition of smaller states able to articulate a clearer shared vision. This incident underscores that Brazil's pride of place on hemispheric issues is by no means a given, and Brazil's inclination toward multilateralism may not, in itself, be sufficient to navigate major regional crises.

CONCLUSION

In its quest for “seriousness,” Brazil suffers from a foreign policy at times lacking in coherence. It chafes at U.S. unilateralism and dreams of a world where Washington contents itself with a seat at the table, but not at its head. At the same time, the powers Brazil courts in pursuit of benign multipolarity are themselves unlikely to be content with a mere seat at the table, and far more likely to desire a position of leadership. Indeed, when it comes to issues like territorial disputes, China and Russia appear perfectly content with unilateral action. As great power competition continues to challenge and divide international institutions, Brazil may very well have the chance to establish its diplomatic bona fides as a champion of a cooperative and rules-based order. Doing so, however, will not only require strategic vision and sustained commitment from Brasília but a recognition that it may not always be possible to engage with all countries, especially when those countries seek to actively upend or subvert the very rules by which Brazil wishes the world to play. ■

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