**An Analysis of Brazil’s Emerging Power Narrative: Legitimizing Claims of Power and Contradictions Counter the Approach**

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1. **Abstract**

*Current international dynamics foreshadow a shift in the global world order, one that will allow emerging powers to claim greater influence. The following paper examines the strategic narrative the country of Brazil is using to legitimize their grasp at power. It also highlights the challenges that countries of lesser power face when pitting their narrative against that of a well-established international player. In the end, it may all boil down to a battle of narratives. For Brazil specifically, much of their current dilemma is brought about by the conflicting nature of their chosen narrative and their contradicting actions. The paper also seeks to provide recommendations for the country moving forward, as well and recommendations for other countries facing similar issues. Certain recommendations in particular have to do with strengthening strategic narratives and investing in a well thought out public diplomacy strategy.*

**Introduction**

Spanning over three-million square miles, Brazil is the world's fifth-largest country and the largest in South and Latin America. Throughout its storied history, this resource-rich and population-dense nation has become a focal point for global interest, growing even more so in recent years.

Starting in the early 1500s Brazil – which was inhabited by numerous tribal nations at the time – was “discovered” and claimed by the Portuguese Empire. The period referred to by scholars as Colonial Brazil lasted for more than three-hundred years, with the country winning its independence in 1822. From that point on, and throughout numerous wars and regimes, dictatorships and misaligned intentions, the country of Brazil would find itself navigating the ebbs and flows of the developing world.

In the late 1900s (1974 to 1988) Brazil experienced a political opening, liberating itself from the country’s ruling military regime. With the transition to democracy underway, Brazil and its leaders started to map out their intentions for the country. It was during this period that the Brazilian Workers’ Party officially formed, a left leaning group often classified as identifying with a 21st Century social democracy. With the rise in the Workers’ Party came the increased notoriety of one member in particular, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Lula had a clear plan for Brazil; one that would get him elected to serve as President of Brazil for two consecutive terms – first from 2003 to 2010 – and again being elected to serve for a third term in 2022. Lula, the loudest spokesperson for the country of Brazil, would categorize the time in between his terms in office, a time when Brazil was largely isolated from the global community, as an “inexplicable absence”. (France-Presse, 2023) With the man elected, former-President and retired military officer Jair Bolsanaro, inciting a rise amongst far-right extremists in the country—echoing democratic rollbacks of the country’s past.

Now, with Lula back at the helm, Brazil is working to repair its global image by adopting a plan to reposition itself as an emerging power in the international system. In a speech President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva gave at the World Economic Forum in 2010 he outlined the country’s goals:

*“I have lately seen many international publications say that Brazil is fashionable nowadays. Allow me to say that, although that is a kind expression, it is not appropriate. Fashions are fleeting, ephemeral things.* ***Brazil wishes to be and will be a permanent player in the new world scene. Brazil, however, does not wish to be a new force in an old world. The Brazilian voice wants to announce, loud and clear, that a new world can be built. Brazil wishes to aid in the construction of this new world****…”* (Lula da Silva, 2010)

The “new world” Lula mentions is a reflection of the shared idea, also held by other countries across the world, that the current international world order – or the internationally established system and arrangements of power tasked with preserving global political stability – has reached maturity. There is a belief that the new and emerging world order will be one that is far more reflective of a multipolar and multi-civilizational distribution of power; no longer a straightforward reflection of American and Western values and interests (Menon, 2022). Countries across the world, not just Brazil, are viewing this theorized shift in global dynamics as an opportunity to earn a new standing in the international system—transitioning from weak power to normal, normal to rising, and rising to great.

**Brazil’s Claim to Power**

The decentralization of western ideals allows for countries in the developing world to claim a greater amount of power. With this understanding, there is the possibility that countries like Brazil can gain a greater foothold of influence both economically and politically.

Within the country of Brazil, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and other current leaders have created and solidified a claim to power – or narrative – that for them legitimizes the country’s grasp at a new standing in the world order. The narrative they have strategically created and pursued frames Brazil as an emerging world power. The country is focused on conveying this narrative to the global community so that (a.) others begin to widely accept their new identity, and (b.) the acceptance of their status as an emerging world power legitimizes their attempts to play a greater role in shaping and exerting influence over the new international system of norms.

**I. The Emerging World Power Narrative**

The three main characteristics that Brazil’s strategic narrative relies on portray the country as a leader in South and Latin America, a defender of multilateralism and global corporations, and a representative at-large for countries in the developing world. In *Figure 1: The Emerging World Power* we examine the master and identity narratives, system narratives, and issue narratives that make-up Brazil’s claim to power.

A master narrative is a transhistorical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture; it explains the whole history of a culture, how they got to be the way they are. (Halverson, Goodall, Jr., Corman, 2011) A similar type of narrative, identity narratives indicate a country’s place in the world. (Miskimmon, et al 2013) Brazil as an emerging world power identifies with the identity narratives that portray the country as a representative at-large for countries in the developing world, a diplomatic leader, a defender of multilateralism, and a friend to all. They recognize that internal challenges have held them back, but as they surpass the mid-levels of development, they view themselves as being adequately and strategically capable of accepting the level of international power they’ve long been preparing for.

A system narrative describes how the world is structured, who the players are, and how they interact with one another. (Miskimmon, et al 2013) Brazil has been operating as a normal power within the current world order, also referred to as the Rules-based International Order (RBIO). The RBIS is a set of rules, norms, and institutions first discussed post-World War II to create a “coherent system of global governance”. (Latham, 2022) The Rules-based International Order was constructed during the “heyday of globalizing liberalism” and is grounded on key values like free markets, pro-democracy, and human rights being promoted by international organizations and non-governmental organizations alike. The leaders of this system have historically been North America (also known as the West) and strong economic and political powers in Europe. Brazil has facilitated the continuation of this system by promoting similar system narratives; pro-democracy, pro-global cooperation, and pro-hemispheric integration – or the idea that the northern, southern, eastern, and western hemispheres can work together as one.

The last level of Brazil’s claim to power, are the country’s issue narratives. (Miskimmon, et al 2013) Issue narratives are more episodic in nature and those listed in *Figure 1: The Emerging World Power Narrative* are the ones that Brazilian leaders would categorize as being the most pressing concerns in the nation. From ongoing concerns surrounding domestic politics and far-right extremism in the country to Brazil’s rich and diverse pool of natural resources and human capital there are several catalysts for the country’s desire to rise in rankings—and these often play a critical role in the country’s decision-making processes.

***Figure 1. The Emerging World Power Narrative***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Late 1990s – Present Day…* | Master & Identity Narratives | System Narratives | Issue Narratives |
| Emerging Global Power  Representative at-large for developing countries and for neighboring countries in Latin America  Internal challenges have held them back  Surpassing the middle level of development  Defender of multilateralism  Diplomatic leader  Friend to all | *\*Rules-based international order (RBIO)*  Member of Pro-Democracy nations  Pro Hemispheric Integration  Global Cooperation | Domestic Politics  Natural Resources  Human Capital  Social Reforms |

*\*RBIO is the international framework for most normal powers during the years outlined, currently reaching maturity.*

**II. The Narrative in Action Pt. 1**

The components of Brazil’s narrative can be seen on display during President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva February 10th (2023) meeting with President of the United States Joe Biden at the White House in Washington, D.C. The two heads of state spoke of the multilateral relations between the two countries and of their shared interests as the “largest democracies in the Western Hemisphere”. (The United States Government, 2023) For Brazil, this visit successfully framed their emerging world power narrative to the global public. In the joint statement issued by Lula and Biden several of Brazil’s key narratives were reiterated.

The following quotations were pulled from the joint statement. Key excerpts are bolded:

* “...During the meeting, the two leaders reaffirmed the vital and enduring nature of the U.S.-Brazil relationship and underscored that **strengthening democracy, promoting respect for human rights, and addressing the climate crisis remain at the center of their common agenda.** As leaders of the two largest democracies in the Americas, President Biden and President Lula pledged to work together to strengthen democratic institutions…”
* “**They recognize the leading role Brazil and the United States can play cooperating both bilaterally and multilaterally**…”
* “The leaders also expressed their determination to fight hunger and poverty, enhance global food security, foster trade and remove barriers, promote economic cooperation, and **strengthen international peace and security.**”
* “They also discussed their interest in intensifying bilateral cooperation…”
* “President Biden and President Lula affirmed their intention to **strengthen cooperation in multilateral institutions**…The two leaders expressed their intent to work together toward meaningful United Nations Security Council reform, such as expansion of the body to include permanent seats for countries in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to be more representative of the broader UN membership and enhance its ability to more effectively address the most pressing matters of global peace and security.”

The above quotations reinforce the identity, system, and issue narratives identified in *Figure 1: The Emerging World Power Narrative*. Several lines directly reference key phrases instrumental in legitimizing Brazil's claim to power.

**Challenging their Claims**

Narratives can be powerful tools for countries; they have the power to resolve conflict, influence audiences, frame local events, and incite future action. It is often said that conflict comes out in actions. And as Brazil’s emerging world power narrative becomes increasingly accepted by the global community, it also becomes the subject of greater scrutiny and the catalyst for increased conflict.

In large part, Brazil’s claim to power focuses on the country’s ability to promote the ideals of the Rules-based International Order (RBIO). Their narratives are focused on pro-democracy and global cooperation, and their master narratives frame them as a diplomatic leader and defender of multilateralism. All of which frame the country’s claim to power through an altruistic lens. However, it has long been observed that in instances of similar power transitions and shifts in global dynamics, it is the weaker power, rather than the stronger, more established power that is most likely to be the aggressor. This theoretical framework, or phenomenon rather, has been coined as Thucydides’ Trap. Thucydides’ Trap is a term used by political scientists to explain the “natural, inevitable discombobulation that occurs when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power…”. (Allison, 2021) This theory showcases that when in the search for power, it is more likely than not that those rising in rankings will find themselves in conflict with existing ones.

According to Thucydides’ Trap, tensions between emerging and existing powers and the likelihood that they end in escalation are the rule, not the exception—and Brazil’s actions, albeit framed altruistically, do not defy this framework.

**I. Deviating from the Narrative**

In more than one instance, Brazil and the country’s leaders have made it clear that they wish to have the freedom to pursue their own goals and interests, even if they interfere with the values or preferences of the West and Europe. In fact, much of the country’s actions when taken at face value are not easily framed by the narratives outlined in *Figure 1: The Emerging World Power.* Many of Brazil’s recent actions can more accurately be explained by a counter narrative, one that is being constructed by countries threatened by Brazil’s search for power.

As Brazil sheds its former identity and begins to take on a new, more powerful one it must navigate the rising tensions between itself and other countries of similar or greater power. *Figure 2: Counter Narrative*, examines the viewpoints of the countries in the West and Europe—those of equal or greater power who are threatened by Brazil’s revisionist behavior. In the international system, revisionist behavior is when a country pursues its own ends to the detriment of the international order—seeking to change the order itself. To these countries, Brazil is a challenger. The country’s economic and political influence over the developing world is threatening, as is their work to decentralize North America and Europe from international systems.

Another area of significance is the role Brazil plays as an active participant in international forums—even ones not officially recognized by the West. Brazil, a founding member of the United Nations, is also part of a coalition of countries with fast-growing economies. Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) began informally meeting in 2001. Now, these countries hold an annual summit. And according to data collected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), BRICS represents 40% of the world population and 26% of the world economy. (IMF, 2009) All of the countries involved in BRICS also work closely with Iran, with some of the participants recognizing Iran as another participant of the forum.

In *Figure 2: Counter Narrative,* the issue narratives listed are some of the factors that uniquely position Brazil to be a threatening rising power, in particular for counties in the West and Europe. To synthesize, each of these issues provides Brazil with influence, especially when observing the vast reserves of human capital and natural resources available within the country’s geographic borders. As it pertains to trade, Brazil’s close ties with global powers like Iran and the United States can be viewed as intimidating – many global actors rely on Brazil for iron ore and crude petroleum. And lastly, another area of concern, is Brazil’s recent announcement that they intend to create a new common currency, the sur. This currency has the potential to reduce dependence on and devalue the dollar and the euro—two of the currently most traded currencies in the world.

***Figure 2. Counter Narrative***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Master & Identity Narratives | System Narratives | Issue Narratives |
| Emerging Global Power  Leader for developing countries  Wields economic and political influence | Decentralize North America & Europe  Active International Forums (i.e. UN, BRICS, councils with China, Russia) | Natural Resources/Human  Capital  Trade  Currency |
|

**II. The Narrative in Action Pt.2**

During a state visit to China, to meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and discuss trade and the war in Ukraine, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva conducted interviews that reinforced the threatening nature of Brazil’s claim to power. (Mendonca, 2023)

The following quotations were pulled from interviews conducted by Lula. Key excerpts are bolded:

* “**The United States needs to stop encouraging war and start talking about peace;** the European Union needs to start talking about peace so that we can convince Putin and Zelensky that peace is in the interest of everyone, and that war is only interesting, for now, to the two of them.”
* “I have a theory that I have already defended with Macron, with Olaf Scholz of Germany, and with Biden, and yesterday, we discussed at length with Xi Jinping. **It is necessary to constitute a group of countries willing to find a way to make peace**…”
* And when questioned about his stance, Lula said is not looking to **“please anyone”** over stance on the war in Ukraine.

These selected quotations reinforce the identity, system, and issue narratives identified in *Figure 2: Counter Narrative.* In several of the above excerpts, Brazil’s revisionist behavior is on display with Lula activating international forums in a threatening manner. The Brazilian President also went as far as to question the motives of the United States, seeking to decentralize the importance of the West and Europe’s opinion on the war. The excerpts also show the international influence Brazil yields in the current international system and can frame the country as a rogue and independent actor.

**Contradicting Narratives**

Narratives are meant to create a shared understanding; a narrative is considered accepted when everybody within your target audience has an understanding that is different from that of the opposing or countering viewpoint. As identified in *Figures 1* and *2*, the country of Brazil is acting in ways that can be framed in two opposing ways. One being more akin to the framework they’ve outlined for themselves, and the other that presents them as an independent actor and credible threat to the international system—a country with the ability to influence other global actors. The reality is, right now Brazil has vestiges of both identities and because of this contradictions are being illuminated.

There are two areas in particular, in which the narratives outlined in *Figures 1* and *2* are in direct conflict with one another. The first being Brazil as a ‘Defender of Multilateralism’ and ‘Global Cooperation’ versus the country acting as an ‘Activator of International Forums’, and the second being Brazil as a ‘Friend to All’ whilst being a proponent for decentralizing the West and Europe from international systems.

**I. Defender of Multilateralism & Global Cooperation vs. Activator of International Forums**

Brazil’s stance as a defender of multilateralism and global cooperation came up multiple times over the course of Lula's visit to the White House in February 2023. Supporting multilateralism and global cooperation would best be exemplified by fostering positive collaboration between several countries in pursuit of a common goal and the betterment of the international community. Yet, through its actions, Brazil is knowingly supporting rogue states, like Iran, through the creation of emerging international forums. Take BRICS for example, an international group that gives credibility and power to unstable actors, like Russia, Iran, and China—all three of which are in some part associated.

Brazil’s chosen identity narratives conflict with their actions, seeing as that global cooperation is not a priority for rogue states.

1. **Friend to All vs. Decentralize North America & Europe**

Brazil is also balancing the line between being a friend to all and an outspoken proponent for decentralizing western ideals—calling into question the role of North American and Europe in the international order. As Brazil accumulated power, it was important for leaders in the country to form close alliances with different types of countries. This led with Brazil fostering relationships with both the United States and Iran for example. But as Brazil continues its reach for power, it is calling into question the centralization of power in the West. A world being led by current powers does not hold enough space for emerging countries, especially those in the developing world—which Brazil represents and leads.

To gain its desired foothold of influence Brazil found itself stepping out of alliances, gaining power through new ones. Their identity narrative as a friend to all was put into question by their accumulation of power and assembly of a new identity.

These contradictions are undercutting Brazil's emerging power narrative, showcasing the imperfections in the country’s thinking. And they are ubiquitous: Brazil is pro-democracy but supports Iran, Brazil is pro-hemispheric integration but introduces currency only present in South America, Brazil is a diplomatic leader but is not looking to “please anyone” when discussing international matters, and the list goes on. (Person, 2023) & (Steinberg, n.d.)

**Observations & Recommendations**

The journey to become a global superpower is in many regards the same as a narrative battle. A global superpower would be defined as a country or state with a dominant position in the international order, specifically one that is characterized by its ability to exert significant influence over other countries and the power it yields on a global scale. And to win a narrative battle, the speaker must convey a collection of stories that illustrate a common theme so clearly and concisely that everyone has a shared understanding of the facts, and beyond that the shared understanding is the speaker’s chosen narrative. In addition, everybody must hold a narrative different to what your opponent’s is. The pursuit of both can best be summarized as an exertion of influence over an audience’s thoughts and actions.

As Brazil works to achieve acceptance for their emerging status in the new world order and legitimize its attempts to play a greater role in shaping new international power dynamics, they must also successfully get others to widely accept its new identity. Brazil’s largest obstacle is overcoming the counter narrative that has been constructed by players in the West and Europe in the face of the country’s rise to power. The conflict accompanying Brazil’s revisionist behavior has threatened the international order as it is currently organized, and because of this countering arguments are putting pressure on Brazil's framework—forcing the contradicting nature of what the country is saying and what they are doing to undermine its goals.

**I. Framework Feedback**

One of the greatest challenges Brazil faces in becoming an emerging power is dealing with the fallout of putting the role of other more influential countries into question. To remain in control of its narrative, political-decision makers within the country must make use of credible, consistent, and simple messaging. Beyond that, they must ensure their narrative remains culturally congruent, applying evidence-based nurturing that agrees with the preferred cultural values, beliefs, worldview, and practices of the audience in which they are targeting.

Cultural congruence ensures that narratives are grounded in ideas that most people believe to be true, they are in many ways indisputable. As Brazil continues to put its own motives into question by acting in a way that contradicts the nature of its narrative, it is imperative that they attach their claim to power to indisputable facts.

To effectively oppose the counter narratives that have emerged, Brazil should further emphasize its new status in the international order will be as a representative at-large for developing countries and for neighboring countries in Latin America. As an influential figurehead for millions of people and a vast array of natural resources, the arguments that it should play a larger role in influencing global politics can be grounded in facts like with a population of over 200 million people, Brazil makes up almost half the population of South America and nearly 60% of the Amazon Rainforest is in Brazil. External actors already acknowledge the country's vast human capital and natural resources.

Instead of emphasizing cooperation, diplomatic leadership, and its intentions of being a friend to all, Brazil can avoid implicating itself through contradictions by affixing its narrative to an area in which it can point to culturally congruent examples. In Brazil’s emerging power narrative its claim is legitimized because the country has been fostering global cooperation through the strengthening of multilateral relations, working to support and strengthen international peace and security. To avoid acting in opposition to what it is saying, Brazil should focus on its role as a leader and representative at-large for developing countries pointing to the following: As the country with half the population of South America, Brazil deserves a seat at the table; denying it a role of influence would be to deny an entire continent the right to have a say in global affairs.

**Conclusion**

As the Rules-based International Order (RBIO), the current governing set of global rules, norms, and institutions reaches maturity a new set of global players will be uniquely positioned to acquire power and influence. This means, the global community is sure to witness the emergence of narrative battles between emerging and rising powers and ones of equal or increasing power, like the case of Brazil.

Brazil is not a special case, but rather the reflection of the new world order, one that is shaped as much by the good luck of leadership as it is by the free will of policymakers. Many theorists see the ways in which the new world order breeds unregulated great-power competition and conflict, like power transition theories previously explained and exemplified through the case of Brazil.

It is with that being said, that one can theorize that the new world order will be determined by the best messengers – or the countries that are best at getting others to adopt their narratives. Essentially the fight for power will boil down to a narrative battle.

The new global superpowers may not be the countries with the most economic, political, or military power but rather the ones that have the best speakers reiterating and delivering their messages. Or the countries that invest the most in public diplomacy. Public diplomacy has been used for decades to convince targeted sectors of foreign opinion to support or tolerate a government's strategic objectives—or in other words, to adopt a specific narrative. The practice of public diplomacy is government-sponsored efforts aimed at communicating directly with foreign publics, and it will be the method most necessary for countries looking to create the new set of systems that rule the international system. For it is these countries that will be able to successfully convey a narrative to the global community that is widely accepted by many global actors and audiences and that are able to root their role of shaping new international power dynamics in legitimate claims.

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