

The Ideational Elements of Brazil's Arab Strategy: An Assessment (2002-2010)

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Abstract: *Relations between the countries of Latin America and the Middle East have been an under researched topic within their respective fields.^② This can be attributed, at least partly, to the fact that both regions have a comparatively low level of diplomatic and economic interactions, when contrasted, for example, with relations between Latin America and the European Union, or between the Gulf Cooperation Council and Asia. In the specific case of Brazil, even though the latter has decades old relations with selected Arab countries, such as Iraq, very little has been written about its interactions with the Arab world in general. One of the reasons for this may be attributed to the dearth of issues of high politics underscoring this relationship, issues that if present could assist in capturing media and academic attention. This article seeks to contribute to the study of both regions by focusing on a particular moment of Brazilian foreign policy when relations with the Arab world were at their peak in terms of visibility.*

Key Words: *Brazil and the Middle East; Latin America; International Relations; Brazil and the Gulf*

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^② An important exception in this regard is A. Galindo, *The Gulf and Latin America: An Assessment of Expectations and Challenges*, Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre Cambridge, 2014.

This article seeks to contribute to the study of both regions by focusing on a particular moment of Brazilian foreign policy when relations with the Arab world were at their peak in terms of visibility. I refer, naturally, to the Presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2002-2010); a time during which the improvement of the domestic economic situation, combined with the enthusiastic personalities of the President and his Chancellor Celso Amorim, led Brazil into an extensive “charm” operation within the international system. Emboldened by what Sean Burges called “rising self-esteem” (Burges, 2009: 169-171), this change in the country’s domestic self-image translated into a willingness to operate more visibly and assertively in the international arena. The upgrade of Brazil’s relationship with the Arab countries was part of that strategy. Indeed, diplomatic discourse commonly utilized the concept of “strategic partnership” to define the growing relationship between Brazil and that part of the world. Due to the strong ideational content underpinning the ways this term was deployed, this concept will be understood here as an operation of strategic framing made by Brazil towards Arab governments. This operation had two main goals: first, to facilitate and deepen cooperation between Brazil and the Arab countries by appealing to values of similarity and cultural connection.^① Second, to build Brazil’s credibility as a potential security actor in Arab affairs so that the former could be accepted as mediator in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Seen in broad terms, these objectives are congruent with a very traditional aim of Brazilian foreign policy: to further the country’s international recognition of its capabilities and to be seen as a global player (Schenoni, L., 2012: 31-48; A. L. Cervo, 2008). My argument is that “strategic partnership”, as deployed in the relationship between Brazil and the Arab world, was mostly present as an *idea* inhabiting the

^① This was clear in Luiz Fernando Furlan’s speech to an audience of entrepreneurs. In his quality as former minister for development, industry and foreign trade, he stated that “the relationship between Brazil and the Arab countries is 100% more heart than business” (Rocha and Pagel, 2003).

former's diplomatic discourse. Thus, viewing the term "strategic partnership" as an ideational construction is a means to bypass the discussion of whether this approximation was of a political or of a commercial nature, a simplistic dichotomy that marred much of the debate in Brazil. Consequently, particular emphasis will be placed in the content analysis of speeches delivered by Lula da Silva, a methodological choice, which reflects the powerful role of the President in the Brazilian system.

This study will unfold by examining three key periods of the relationship between Brazil and the Arab countries, presented in a chronological order. These are: i) President Lula's visit in 2003 to the Arab region; ii) the creation of the Arab - Latin America Summit (ASPA); and, iii) the Brazilian offers made from 2006 to 2010 to mediate in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In these three snapshots, I will examine Brazil's strategic framing of its own credentials so as to portray itself as a relevant partner in Arab politics in the eyes of its target-audience: the Arab countries. Within these three episodes, iii) the mediation offers were the ones that attracted less national and international attention; and (ii) the establishment of ASPA, despite the skeptical analysis that accompanied its formation, ended up being the only initiative that bore fruit and that endured past the term of Lula da Silva. I am leaving the events that led to the Declaration of Tehran purposefully outside of this analysis. Since this is a specific moment when Brazil tried to be part of security arrangements in the Gulf area, I feel this is better examined in a separate article. Moreover, since Iran is not an Arab country, it is naturally excluded from the present analysis. I will finish with briefly summing up the argument as well as making some general comments, specifically referring to the changes brought about by Dilma Rousseff's tenure to the relationship between Brazil and the Arab world.

I. Strategic Partnership Understood as a Framing Operation

The “diplomatic operation” towards the Middle East was part of an overall drive to promote south-south cooperation, a strategy that was similarly directed at African and Asian countries. The goal was to reaffirm (or firm) economic-political bounds with countries that were traditionally of little relevance to Brazilian foreign policy (Burges, 2009: 161-184). At that time, the term strategic partnership was widely used within Brazilian diplomatic discourse in order to refer to these new relations. The concept was utilized in a very loose way, mainly as a “stylistic resource”, whose purpose was to bestow a “certain political-economic relationship with a sense of opportunity and urgency” (Lessa, 2009: 97-100). Defined in such a way, relations with Arab countries were classified as “strategic”, “innovative” and even “bold” (See Carrieri, 2011, as regards Egypt; Rocha and Daniel, 2004, regarding Libya; Rocha, 2004, for Arab countries in general). This vigorous classification of the relationship between Brazil and Arab countries also served as a departure point for the realization of a project, which was undoubtedly of high risk: that of positioning Brazil as a strategic actor in the Arab international political scene. In order to do so, it was necessary to build Brazil’s credentials so as to justify its entry into international negotiation processes where the main players had been European countries such as France and the UK and other great powers such as China, the US and Russia. Even though Brazil was generally seen as an emerging power, the type of contribution that it could give to these processes, given the low level of diplomatic and economic interactions, was not self-evident. Hence, the term strategic partnership was operationalized as a framing procedure whereby the strategic actor (Brazil) elaborated on complex problems of the target audience’s direct experience (Arab countries) and presented them in a favourable interpretative package that would fulfil the actor’s goals (i.e., to portray Brazil as a potentially credible partner

in Arab politics).

Framing should thus be understood as a political tool that can be utilized by political leaders to delineate “strategies of action” that will bring about support for their initiatives and policies. Because it is an interactional and interpretative process between the strategic actor and the audience, framing has a dynamic nature (See Snow et al, 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988). The capacity of the strategic actor to choose the ideational elements that are more appropriate to serve as basis for the reinterpretation presented is central for the success (or failure) of the operation. At stake were Brazil’s attempts to convince its audience (Arab countries), to support the policies it presented (in i, ii, and iii). Therefore, I will utilize a formulation of framing which was previously applied to a political advisory context (Garrison 2001). The setting is thus merely expanded from the small advisory circle analyzed by Garrison into a broader arena, from a political leader to another. Furthermore, given the strong ideational content that was in-built into the Brazilian overtures to the Arab world (and as mentioned, the emphasis on similarity and cultural connection); the criteria that underlie this formulation are particularly suitable. Therefore, I suggest that the framing performed by the Brazilian government can be analyzed as fitting into three criteria: 1) the symbolic dimension, both historical and cultural, that Brazil’s participation would bring about; 2) the connection between the proposals and the beliefs/values of the target-audience; and 3) a positive evaluation of the political benefits that this strategy would generate.

This examination is not meant to be exhaustive regarding both the empirical materials as well the theoretical reach of the concept. On the one hand, it is meant to illustrate the analytical possibilities that a more precise definition of the term strategic partnerships – within the context of Brazilian foreign policy – can bring about when examined in the light of specific cases. On the other hand, and on more general terms, it seeks to highlight the advantages of privileging an ideational route of analysis for

inter-regional studies of the Middle East and Latin America, as it assists in moving the debate forward from more descriptive stances that are prevalent in the literature.

i) The Beginning: Visiting Arab countries

Lula da Silva was the second Brazilian head of state to visit the Middle East after Emperor Pedro the Second undertook a trip to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century; and the first to visit the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. This data alone already shows in a very clear way the lack of dealings between Brazil and the Middle East. Lula's visit to five Arab countries occurred in December 2003, and the goal was to increase cooperation and trade. The countries selected were the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Libya. These countries concentrated at the time about 30% of the region's GDP, and the expectation was the commercial agreements would be signed with all five countries. This visit was also seen as an opportunity to present Brazil as a safe investment option particularly for the Arab countries of the Gulf. The visit to the UAE attracted particular interest for its potential as an importer; and Egypt was chosen for its size and importance. Syria and Lebanon were selected due to cultural reasons, since a sizeable portion of Brazil's population is of Syrian and Lebanese descent. ^① It was then expected that cultural affinities would facilitate rapprochement (Napolitano, 2003).

In this visit, the attempts to induce rapport by emphasising themes that can be neatly allocated to and explored within each of the three criteria above were quite obvious. In one of the speeches delivered during that visit, links between Brazil and the Arab world were exalted by referring to the existence of an important Arab community in Brazil as well as to the Iberian roots of much of the population^②—*symbolic and historical dimension* (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2008a: 183). The presence of the second

^① See Messari, 2006, pp. 243-266, for a synthesis of the criticism levelled by Brazilian observers and commentators to this visit.

^② Regrettably, no further information is given about the context or the precise date in which this speech was delivered.

criterion – *connection with values and beliefs of the target audience* – was also evident when the former president underlined the community of values and of foreign policy between Brazil and the Arab countries. Specifically, he stated that Brazil, like the Arabs, also sought a sustainable peace; emphasised state sovereignty and self-determination; respect for international law; right to development and use of natural resources; protection of cultural diversity and preservation of national and regional characteristics. Clearly, Lula da Silva considered that this was a strategy that would deliver *positive results* since the points that he chose to emphasise are important features of Arab politics. The search for peace, for example, is usually associated to the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Additionally, issues connected to the respect for international law and more specifically state sovereignty were pretty much on the agenda in those days. Specifically, at that time, both Afghanistan and Iraq had already been invaded, in 2001 and 2003, respectively, and their regimes overturned. The Arab countries were particularly susceptible to these issues and many feared, including the closest allies to the US such as the Gulf monarchies that they too would be subject to forcible political change. The following year, in 2004, the prime minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al Makhtoum, at the Forum of Arab strategy, uttered the famous phrase “if you do not change, you will be changed” (al Makhtoum, 2004), referring to the need of initiating political changes given the democratic zeal of the Bush administration. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Lula’s discourse found a receptive environment among the Arab countries.

During this visit, the former president also met Amr Moussa, and he was the first Brazilian head of state to have visited the Arab League (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2008b: 184). The speech Lula delivered stressed precisely the same lines; Lula da Silva hailed the profound historical and cultural bounds between the Arab countries and Brazil, which in his opinion explained the cordiality and mutual respect that underscored their relationship

(connection with values of target audience). He also emphasised Brazil's rich inheritance of Arab-Islamic civilization, which had been acquired via Portugal. Highlighted the existence of more than ten million Brazilians of Arab descent and the way they contributed to the formation of Brazilian identity, culture enrichment and socioeconomic development (*historical and cultural symbolism/positive evaluation of strategy*). Lula also lauded the acceptance of Brazil as an observer of the Arab League^①, as the beginning of a process in which Brazil would regularly accompany the positions of the Arab world about the most important topics of the international agenda (*positive political evaluation of the strategy/connection with values and beliefs of target audience*).

From the above, it can be surmised that Lula da Silva's framing operation was quite successful. The elements utilized for this framing were drawn essentially from the worldview of the strategic actor, a choice that usually condemns a framing operation to failure. Nevertheless, since he tried to connect positive elements of Brazilian culture with their purported Arab origins, emphasising the Brazilian community of Arab descent in the process, it was a 'charm operation' that went well. The goal was to establish an initial rapport, which was not overly ambitious and goals that would require a more comprehensive and sophisticated framing operation. Furthermore, this visit occurred two years after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Arab countries were feeling culturally and religiously "sieged" by the association that was being made worldwide about their religion and terrorism. They were under intense international scrutiny as regards their social practices, their domestic organization, and their politics. Within this context, Brazil's courteous overtures were well received and seemingly appreciated.^② It should also be reminded

^① Brazil and Venezuela are the only South-American countries with the status of observers within the Arab League.

^② In March 2012, I conducted a small fieldwork stay in the UAE, and I spoke to academics, both Emirati and foreign. The relationship with Brazil was one

that in that period there was a certain excitement with the possibilities of Brazil becoming a global player, as evidenced by the international press of the time.

b) The South America-Arab countries Summit (ASPA)

The inter-regional bloc ASPA was established in 2005, spearheaded by Lula da Silva. The creation of this organization formalized, for the first time, institutional relations between the two regions.^① This new initiative was received with suspicion in Brazil. Analysts emphasised the geographic distance, the few existing institutional interactions (Fares, 2007; Santana, 2006); as well as the supposed inexistence of common interests, as reasons that would condemn this inter-regional mechanism to failure. Among commentators, there was a certain difficulty in bypassing more superficial issues, such as trying to establish whether this enterprise was commercial or political. Hence, debate on ASPA was quite sterile, and maybe, because of that, academic interest in this mechanism has been limited, generating only scant and superficial assessments.^②

The first meeting took place in Brasília, from May 10-11, 2005. In the inaugural speech (Presidência da República Federativa do Brasil, 2005: May 10), President Lula sought, once again, to exalt the emotional and cultural bounds between the two regions. He claimed to be extending his Arab guests a welcome in the best tradition of Brazilian hospitality, which, he added, had been

of my questions. It was clear that my interview partners had a very positive image of the country, even though they could not provide specific reasons for it.

^① The countries' initiative is the following: South America: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guiana, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Arab countries: Algeria, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine's National Authority, Qatar, Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Tunisia, and Yemen.

^② These have included, e.g., small pieces in specialized bulletins (see Cervo, 2005; Manzur, 2005), reviews (Nogueira, 2005), or opinion articles in journals (Nahes, 2006). The most notable exception is Vagni, 2005.

inherited from the Arab countries (*connection with values of the audience/symbolic dimension*). According to Lula, the realization of the Summit expressed the commitment of bringing together, in a “pioneering way” two regions that are geographically apart (*symbolic dimension*). In his speech, the fight for development and social justice occupied, once more, a prominent position (*connection with values of audience*). He thus elected ASPA as a “demonstration of trust in dialogue and as a way of bringing together distant countries, different cultures, and differing world perceptions” (*symbolic dimension*), a goal which is rooted in the sharing of values such as “tolerance and mutual respect, as well as aspirations to development” (*connection with values of audience*).

As before, he reaffirmed the influence of Arab culture on the formation of Brazilian identity, a phenomenon that occurred via the Iberian Peninsula as well as through Arab immigration in Brazil (*symbolic dimension/connection with values of target group*). In addition, he also highlighted the enthusiasm and emotion that the summit generated among the Arab communities of South America (*connection with values of the target group*). From the framing attempts at generating identification, he moved to the economic advantages that the rapport between the two regions could generate. He also added that it heralded the creation of a new world order that would consider “the legitimate interests of the developing countries”, by democratizing international institutions (*symbolic dimension/connection with values of the target group*).

The Declaration of Brasília, the outcome of this Summit, explains that the central goals of the latter were to “strengthen bi-regional relations, to widen cooperation and to establish a partnership for development, justice and international peace” (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2005). The Declaration thus reaffirms intentions for economic, cultural and technological cooperation. Also worth mentioning is the presence of an extraordinary number of issues related to Arab politics, a tendency that as we will see, is replicated in further meetings. Themes

include the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; the Israeli and Iranian nuclear programmes; Iraqi politics; opposition to unilateral sanctions imposed by the US to Syria; terrorism; and the territorial dispute between Iran and the UAE as regards the status of the three islands, Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunbs.

The next meeting took place in Doha, Qatar on the March 31, 2009. Lula da Silva delivered a speech at the opening session where he referred to the pioneering character of the dialogue enabled by ASPA, hailing the second meeting as an opportunity to continue the work begun in Brasília. He stated that his government wished to deepen relations with the Arab countries to transform them into a long-term partnership by reducing physical distances, approximating world visions, and integrating peoples and cultures (*symbolic dimension*). In addition, Lula also mentioned the strengthening of commercial interactions, with an increase of 170% in four years, as well as the development of technical and cultural projects between the two regions (*positive evaluation*). References were also made to the urgency in solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as well as the need for Israel to fulfil previous agreements. He defended the idea of holding an international conference about the topic (to be developed in the next section), with the active participation of developing countries (*connection with values of target audience/positive evaluation*). He finished by stressing the necessity to fight myths regarding the incompatibility between democracy and Islam, as well as to preserve Arab culture and its values of tolerance (*connection with values of the target audience*) (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2009a: March 31). The declaration of Doha that closed the meeting did not diverge much from the range of themes addressed in the Declaration of Brasília. Of the nineteen pages of the document, the first five focus exclusively on Arab politics. The increase in meetings and in cooperation between the two regions is hailed and the primacy of cultural issues in this inter-regional relation is quite apparent (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2009b).

What is also interesting to point out is the alteration of Brazil's positioning as regards these matters. While from 2003 to 2005, the discursive emphasis of Brazilian diplomacy fell on the symbolic dimension of the rapport and on the joint interests that underlined the relationship between both countries, in 2009, there was an adding of elements to those previously used. While the importance of the rapport continues to be emphasized, Lula's discourse in Qatar reveals a stronger focus on the Arab Israeli conflict. He stresses the international duties of Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians and refers the proposal that developing countries should participate in these negotiations. The success of this thematic extension will be addressed in the following section.

While analysing the outcome of the framing operation that accompanied the formation of ASPA, it is necessary to underline that, despite very gloomy predictions, this summit survived well beyond the first meeting. The final declarations of both summits did not diverge much thematically, which indicates continuity in terms of issues addressed. Of note in both Declarations is the already mentioned predominance of issues of Arab politics. The third meeting, which was originally foreseen for February 2011, was postponed due to the events of the Arab Spring. It took place in Lima, Peru from October 1-2, 2012. Since this meeting took place during Dilma Rousseff's tenure, I will briefly address its outcomes in the final section. The fourth ASPA meeting is scheduled for November 2015 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, N.d.).

iii) The Arab-Israeli conflict

Brazil's diplomatic engagement in this issue constitutes the last example of the country's framing of its own international credibility towards the Arab world. This particular episode and the type of framing it required diverged slightly from the other two, as the goals of Brazilian diplomacy were far more ambitious in this regard. It was about more than just generating positive rapprochement; Brazil's aim was to firmly portray itself as a

valuable partner in Arab security issues. This would entail a more sophisticated framing operation as it was not self-evident what type of added value Brazil could bring about to the resolution of this decades long conflict.

During this period, there were mutual official visits between Brazil and the Palestinian Authority, and official representations of Palestine in Brasília, and of Brazil in Ramallah were established. A letter sent by Lula da Silva to Mahmood Abbas in 2007 is quite illustrative of Brazil's intentions as regards the path to the resolution of the conflict. In his missive, he reaffirms that the Brazilian government has defended, particularly during his own mandate, the realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a unified state (*connection with values of the target audience*) (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2008c: 187-188). He stated how the establishment of said representations as well as the frequent official visits are evidence of the priority that Brazil attributes to the relation with both the people as well as the Palestinian government. The letter also condemns the actions that resulted in greater suffering of the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza (*connection with values of target audience*). These words form the preamble for the proposal of Brazilian involvement that follows. Lula proposed the enlargement of the international dimension of the peace process (i.e. expanding the number of stakeholders) as a means to promote the advancement of the negotiations. In this context, he refers back to a proposal presented in 2006 at the UN's General Assembly, to convene an international conference focused on the situation in the Middle East that could involve non-Arab nations, including developing countries. He asserts his strong belief that the international community's initiatives towards the resolution of this issue would benefit greatly from the formation of a group of countries, representing different regions, which would promote dialogue and peace. These countries, he added, should possess both a conciliatory profile as well as an internationally recognised credibility. In this way, he argued, they could bring about a cumulative effect to

efforts already under way. By this token, Brazil reaffirmed its “genuine will” to be part of a “Group of friends for peace in the Middle East” that would ideally be coordinated by the UN Secretary General. This letter clearly articulates the Brazilian intentions of positioning itself as an actor in the peace negotiations. The proposal for internationalization clearly aims to include Brazil – a developing country, with a self-proclaimed conciliatory profile, and interested in the concretization of a Palestinian state (*positive evaluation of the strategy*). About two weeks later, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Celso Amorim reiterated this same idea at the Seminar for Peace and Reconciliation held in Oslo (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2008d: 188-189). The creation of the “Group of Friends” would follow the purpose of offering fresh ideas and new perspectives for the peace process (*positive evaluation of the strategy*). This topic, argued Celso Amorim, had hitherto only been dealt with by the great powers and no solutions had been found (*connection with beliefs of the target group/symbolic dimension*). In this context, he continued, it is necessary that more countries are included in this process, a desire that Brazil expressed to the Palestinian Authority and Israel as well as the Quartet (US, Russia, UN and Europe). In his view, the growing force of the Brazilian relationship with the Arab countries placed Brazil in a singular position, i.e., being able to establish a dialogue with both parties (*symbolic dimension/positive evaluation*). The theme was restated during Lula’s second tenure upon the visit of the Kuwaiti Prime-Minister, Sheikh Nasser al-Sabbah, on July 22, 2010 (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2010: July 22). In Lula’s speech, Brazil’s offer to mediate the conflict was renewed, and its credentials for such an undertaking were emphasized. Among these credentials he stressed the “capacity for constructive contribution”, the “good dialogue” it maintained with both parties (*positive evaluation*), as well as the ‘numerous community of people of Arab descent in Brazil’ (*cultural and historical dimension*).

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a matter quite different from a state visit or even ASPA, whose main aims were to promote

cooperation, mostly economic and cultural. The offers of mediation that began in 2006 mark Brazil's attempt to enter into security arrangements in the Middle East. In order to frame itself as a credible partner in such a difficult field, Brazil had to incorporate new elements into this strategic partnership so as to portray itself as a credible actor in security matters. In synthesis, the elements inserted were the following: the strength of Brazil's relationship with Israel and the Arabs which placed it in an ideal position to negotiate with both; the self-proclaimed conciliatory profile of Brazil; as well the contribution that a new actor, from outside the region, could offer. Again, these elements belonged to the ideational universe of Brazil, which accounts for the failure of this framing operation.

II. Afterthought: Dilma Rousseff's Presidency (2010-)

As shown above, the concept of strategic partnership that was deployed as regards Brazil's relations with Arab countries, even though it had some elements from the latter's worldviews - such as a common position on the Palestinian issue and the emphasis on development -, still drew heavily on elements from Brazil's ideational universe. Such a choice usually dooms a framing operation to failure. However, in the case of the i) 2003 state visit and ii) ASPA, the main goal espoused by the Brazilian diplomacy was both to promote rapport between the two regions and to begin developing a more frequent cultural, economic and political dialogue. In the world of international politics, these are quite modest goals. Therefore, for i) the elements deployed- connection, similarity and recognition - sufficed. For ii), in addition to the above elements, one should also mention the complete adherence by South American countries to the Arab political agenda, as evidenced in the three documents that closed each of the three summits - namely, Brasília, Doha and Lima. The latter summit already occurred during the Presidency of Dilma Rousseff, and

some important continuities as well as differences can be observed. The contents of the Lima Declaration are particularly striking. With the summit being held at a time when the Arab Spring was in full bloom, the lack of any reference to the latter in the Declaration is a ludicrous omission. The Declaration of Lima exhorts countries to continue to deepen their cooperation, and perhaps tellingly, almost 4 pages out of 38 are devoted to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict with scant mention of the violence raging in other countries. The exception is the already known standard defence of the principle of non-intervention in the Syrian case (*Repositorio Institucional de La Universidad Nacional de La Plata*, 2012). Therefore, taking a broad view of the three Declarations, rapport between both regions seems to have been largely achieved by omitting any references to subject matters deemed difficult for Arab countries.

If for i) and ii) – the establishing of initial rapport and the founding of ASPA –, the elements deployed by Brazil were sufficient to achieve the country's goals; resonance of iii) Brazil's notion as a security actor for Arab affairs was much harder to achieve, as the elements deployed for this effort did not coalesce, for the reasons put forth in the previous section.

The highly visible Brazilian activism in Arab affairs disappeared almost as quickly as it arose soon after Lula's Presidency ended. His successor, Dilma Rousseff, also from the Workers' Party has been displaying a very different take as regards foreign policy. In the case of the Middle East, she has shown little interest in the high risk, impact-focused strategy of her predecessor. President Dilma's speech at the last ASPA Summit held in Lima in 2012 is quite illustrative of this change. There is no mention of the ideational values Lula utilized in his multiple addresses and that were highlighted throughout this article. Actually, her speech focuses mainly on exalting the 44 per cent increase in trade between the two regions. She also speaks of

the need for development and urges cooperation in energy and food security. Amidst the Arab spring she reinforces Brazil's traditional positions of non-interference and of favouring negotiated solutions among Arabs. The only time she mentions Brazilians of Arab descent is in reference to the sadness that the current situation in Syria causes them, particularly to her vice president, Michel Temer, who is of Arab ancestry (*Portal do Planalto*, 2014: July 4).

More recently, her foreign policy has actually been characterised as one of *decline*, specifically in what concerns Brazil's policies in Latin America (Cervo/Lessa, 2014). However, in the case of ties with Arab countries, even though Brazil does not make headlines anymore as regards its Arab relations, cooperation has indeed increased with selected countries, such as the UAE, which has become Brazil's largest Arab trading partner since 2014. This shows that the relationship cannot be considered in its entirety as one of decay and that further investigation into bilateral cooperation is sorely needed.

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