



The Russo-Ukrainian War and the Brazilian Perspective on the International Order

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Received: 5 November 2023 / Revised: 28 March 2024 / Accepted: 12 June 2024
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Abstract In the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, which Western policymakers widely perceive as a critical juncture shaping the global order and exacerbating the rift between the West and the Global South, this paper seeks to explore whether Brazil, a key voice of the Global South, has reassessed its perspectives on the global order and its aspirations for its role in the wake of the war. Not only is Brazil a key player in the Global South, set to host the G20 and BRICS summits in 2024, but its strategically ambiguous response to the war, which has been relatively consistent under the Bolsonaro and subsequent Lula administrations, has surprised the West and has often been misinterpreted as explicit support for Russia. Based on semistructured interviews with Brazilian diplomats and foreign policy experts, this paper argues that Brazil did not see the Russo-Ukrainian war as a trigger for a major shift in the international order, but rather as symptomatic of a widespread perception in the Global South that the so-called rules-based order defended by the West is inadequate to address global challenges and disruptions. Seeing the war as a confirmation of the need to reform the multilateral architecture, Brazil feels emboldened to actively promote reform processes and foster consensus among Global South countries. Engagement in informal organisations and on issues such as climate change and inclusive social development, where Brazil holds substantial influence, will be central to its efforts to enhance its soft power and promote reform of multilateral institutions.

Keywords Brazilian Foreign Policy · Global order · Global South · Multilateral reform · Russia-Ukraine War

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Der russische Angriffskrieg gegen die Ukraine und die brasilianische Perspektive auf die internationale Ordnung

Abstrakt Vor dem Hintergrund des Krieges zwischen Russland und der Ukraine, der von westlichen Entscheidungsträgern weithin als kritischer Wendepunkt in der bestehenden Weltordnung angesehen wird und die Kluft zwischen dem Westen und dem Globalen Süden vertieft haben soll, untersucht dieser Artikel, ob Brasilien, eine wichtige Stimme des Globalen Südens, seine Perspektive auf die Weltordnung und seine Rolle darin infolge des Krieges neu bewertet hat. Brasilien ist nicht nur ein zentraler Akteur im Globalen Süden und wird 2024 Gastgeber des G20- und BRICS-Gipfels sein, sondern hat den Westen auch mit seiner strategisch ambivalenten Reaktion auf den Krieg überrascht, die unter den Regierungen Bolsonaro und Lula da Silva relativ konsistent war und oft fälschlicherweise als explizite Unterstützung Russlands interpretiert wurde. Basierend auf semi-strukturierten Interviews mit brasilianischen Diplomaten und Außenpolitikexperten argumentiert dieser Artikel, dass Brasilien den russisch-ukrainischen Krieg nicht als Auslöser eines Wandels in der Weltordnung sieht, sondern vielmehr als Symptom einer weit verbreiteten Wahrnehmung im Globalen Süden, dass die vom Westen verteidigte, sogenannte ‘regelbasierte Ordnung’ unzureichend ist, um globale Herausforderungen und Krisen zu bewältigen. Da Brasilien den Krieg als Bestätigung für die Notwendigkeit einer Reform der multilateralen Architektur sieht, fühlt es sich ermutigt, Reformprozesse aktiv zu fördern und Konsens unter den Ländern des Globalen Südens herzustellen. Die Mitwirkung in informellen internationalen Organisationen und Foren sowie in Bereichen wie Klimawandel und inklusive soziale Entwicklung, in denen Brasilien über erheblichen Einfluss verfügt, wird entscheidend für Brasiliens Bemühungen sein, seine Soft Power zu stärken und die Reform multilateraler Institutionen voranzutreiben.

Schlüsselwörter Brasilianische Außenpolitik · Globale Ordnung · Globaler Süden · Multilaterale Reformen · Russland-Ukraine-Krieg

1 Introduction

Western political leaders saw Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 as a direct challenge to the post–Cold War (Western-led) international order, which they perceived as defined by economic openness, multilateralism, security cooperation, and democratic solidarity (Ikenberry 2018). From the West’s perspective, Russia’s annexation of another country’s territory and violation of international law, as a United Nations (UN) Security Council member and a nuclear-armed state, was a critical event requiring a distinct response. The West pushed for a UN resolution condemning Russia, imposed unprecedented unilateral sanctions, and provided substantial military, financial, and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. While the West’s re-

sponse to the war was unified, countries in the Global South¹ reacted in a fragmented manner and did not broadly support the Western response. Although 73% of UN member states condemned the Russian invasion, 35 countries, including China and India, abstained from calling on Russia to withdraw from Ukraine (UN News 2022, 2023). The heterogeneity of the Global South's responses was reflected in the votes at the Arab League Council and the UN General Assembly, where positions varied depending on the subject of the resolution (Khader 2024). Contrary to Western expectations, few Global South countries joined in imposing unilateral sanctions on Russia or providing material support to Ukraine, opting to remain neutral, pragmatic, and distanced amid the conflict.

The heterogeneous responses of countries in the Global South to the war can be attributed to several factors, including different geopolitical, economic, and energy self-interests; different perceptions of the origins and risks of the war (Klyszcz 2023); or the perception of the conflict as primarily a European issue (Ghilès 2023), among others. The unexpected decision by the majority of the Global South not to join the Western response to isolate Russia and turn it into an international pariah was interpreted by many Western policymakers as a sign of their countries' declining influence in the Global South (Shidore 2023). It also led them to see the Russo-Ukrainian war as a catalyst for a changing global order and a growing divide between the West and the Global South.

One country in the Global South whose response to the war was particularly surprising to Western leaders was Brazil. Brazil's approach has been strategically ambiguous. While Brazilian diplomats have condemned Russia's actions at the UN General Assembly, both President Bolsonaro and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, commonly known as Lula, expressed sympathy for Putin's Russia² and criticised the West for imposing unilateral sanctions and supplying arms to Ukraine (Libardi 2022; Ribeiro 2023). Even before assuming the presidency, Lula strongly criticised Western sanctions, equating their power to that of an atomic bomb and highlighting the negative consequences of such a "blockade" even for those not directly involved in the war (Xavier 2022). Brazil's response has frustrated many Western policymakers who, given the country's historical ties to the United States and shared democratic values, expected Brazil to align itself with the West's response, and who may have misinterpreted its response as explicit support for Russia. Western policymakers' interpretation of the Russo-Ukrainian war as a catalyst for change in the global order raises the question of whether Brazil, as a key actor championing the voices

¹ The term Global South broadly refers to non-Western, developing countries facing social, political, and economic challenges that have little in common geographically, culturally, or ideologically. The uneven development of the Global South since the term was coined makes it even more problematic (Hollington et al. 2015, p. 10). For lack of a better alternative, this paper will use the term to refer to non-Western emerging economies.

² On February 27, 2022, Bolsonaro refused to condemn Putin's invasion of Ukraine, despite his government's vote in favour of a UN resolution condemning Russia's actions, and expressed "solidarity with Russia" in nonspecific terms (Stargardter 2022). In an interview with *Time* magazine in May 2022, Lula said that Ukrainian President Zelenskyy was as much to blame for the war as Russian leader Vladimir Putin and that the West was responsible for encouraging the conflict (Nugent 2022).

of the Global South, also changed its perceptions of the international order and its ambitions for its role in it in the wake of the war.

As the fourth largest democracy, the seventh most populous country, the eleventh largest economy, and a key player in the fight against climate change, Brazil is one of the most important emerging powers in the Global South. Brazil also has important relations with the two global superpowers, China and the United States, whose rivalry and intense ideological competition is expected to intensify (Woods 2023). China has been Brazil's largest trading partner since 2009 (Field 2014), while the United States is Brazil's largest source of foreign direct investment.³ The United States and Brazil also cooperate closely on security issues and the promotion of shared values such as democracy and human rights (Berg and Baena 2023). The close alignment between China and Russia during the Russo-Ukrainian war, coupled with a strong Western coalition, has widened the divide between Western nations and the Sino-Russian alliance. It has also intensified the balancing act for countries in the Global South like Brazil. While these countries face increased pressure to align themselves with one of the axes, they may also have greater bargaining power, allowing them to avoid choosing and forging general alliances and instead seek concessions for specific partnerships or the pursuit of certain common foreign policy objectives.⁴

Given the transfer of power from the isolationist Bolsonaro to the internationalist Lula in January 2023 and the lack of understanding among Western policymakers of Brazil's response to the Russo-Ukrainian war, it is pertinent to analyse whether and, if so, how this exogenous shock has changed Brazil's view of the international order. Based on semistructured interviews with 34 Brazilian foreign policy experts and diplomats, I find that Brazil did not see the war as a catalyst for change in the global order, but rather as a disruptive event that reflected the inability of the existing order to deal with global security challenges. The war did not lead Brazilian diplomats to feel an increased pressure to align with either the U.S.–Western or the Russia–China alliance. Instead, it reaffirmed Brazil's commitment to nonalignment. As for Brazil's global aspirations, based on the interpretation of the war as a sign of the urgent need to reform the multilateral architecture, Brazil feels emboldened to act as a promoter of more equitable reform of multilateral organisations and is focusing on increasing support and coalitions in the Global South for these reform goals.

The paper first introduces the analytical framework of Brazil's foreign policy traditions and perceived power dimensions. It then outlines the hypotheses derived from this framework and describes the research design. After a discussion of the findings of the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on Brazil's view of the global order, the paper concludes with the broader implications of the findings.

³ In 2021, the United States was the largest source of foreign direct investment stocks by final beneficiary, with almost US\$192 billion, almost four times the amount of the next largest source country (U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Brazil 2023).

⁴ Australia is an example of a middle power that effectively hedged its economic and security bets between China and the United States until 2017 and has since adopted a strategy of institutional balancing to engage multilaterally with other middle powers and reduce its economic vulnerability in the context of the U.S.–China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. Its strong military capabilities and security ties with the United States have facilitated this strategy (Campbell 2023).



Fig. 1 Analytical framework of Brazil's foreign policy traditions and view of power dynamics

2 Theory and Hypotheses

2.1 Analytical Framework of Brazilian Foreign Policy Traditions and Perceived Power Dimensions

To understand Brazil's current view of the world order—and how it may or may not have changed during the Russo-Ukrainian war—Brazil's foreign policy traditions and its perception of the different dimensions of power can serve as an analytical framework (Fig. 1). Foreign policy traditions are historical patterns, principles, and approaches that guide a country's interactions with other states, shaped by both events and ideas (Nau 2013, p. 39). Brazil has a long tradition of practical and skilful foreign policy dating back to the colonial period. After independence, Brazilian diplomats under then–Foreign Minister Rio Branco, considered the founder of the diplomatic tradition in Brazil, peacefully resolved the border disputes with its South American neighbours by definitively demarcating the frontiers (Burns 1967, p. 196). This period laid the foundations for three key principles of Brazilian foreign policy: nonintervention, self-determination, and peaceful settlement of disputes.⁵

Brazil's wariness of external influence, stemming from its history of European colonisation and repeated U.S. interference, has deeply embedded in its political and legal culture the principle of noninterference in the affairs of other states (Wojcikiewicz Almeida 2013, p. 5). The need to protect and strengthen Brazil's autonomy was emphasised as early as the twentieth century by Minister Rio Branco (Saraiva

⁵ These principles were not only formally enshrined in the Brazilian constitution after the end of the military dictatorship in 1988 but were also already recognised in the 1948 agreements establishing the Organisation of American States. Article 4 of the Brazilian constitution states that the country's foreign relations are governed by ten principles, including the self-determination of peoples, nonintervention, equality among states, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Constitute Project 2022, p. 7).

2014, p. 64). Rooted in the principle of self-determination, Brazil attaches great importance to the functioning of international institutions and multilateral platforms, which are seen as essential mechanisms for safeguarding Brazil's sovereignty and advancing its interests on the global stage.

The peaceful resolution of disputes became another foreign policy tradition in Brazil, stemming from its legacy of peaceful border negotiations. Unlike other regions, South America has been particularly successful in resolving interstate conflicts through peaceful means since the 1990s (Rodrigues and Serbin 2011, p. 267). Due to this principle of peaceful conflict resolution, Brazil strongly adheres to and relies on international law procedures. The country's emphasis on international law is also rooted in its utility as a tool for states with limited hard power, such as Brazil.⁶ Moreover, Brazil derives moral authority from its commitment to peace and the nonviolent resolution of international disputes and views itself as a mediator in international conflicts, guided by its principle of neutrality or nonalignment (Spektor 2023).

In addition to Brazil's foreign policy traditions, an analysis of Brazil's view on the world order and its global ambitions requires consideration of its three-dimensional understanding of national power, encompassing military, economic, and diplomatic or soft power. Given Brazil's limited military power, Minister Rio Branco advocated the use of soft power in the country's international orientation beginning in the early twentieth century (Saraiva 2014, p. 64). As regional conflicts in South America have historically avoided escalating into major military crises, hard power has become less relevant to Brazil's management of its immediate environment (Mares and Trinkunas 2016). Brazil's emphasis on soft power, despite its vulnerability to the disruptive effects of conflict due to global linkages in international trade, investment, and migration, increases its reliance on well-functioning multilateral organisations to secure its sovereignty. Given this reliance on soft power, Brazil also places great importance on forging partnerships to enhance its international influence (Valença and Carvalho 2014). Recognising the link between strengthening soft power, robust domestic foreign policymaking institutions, and a strong diplomatic presence abroad, Brazil has long prioritised building a strong diplomatic capacity (Lustig 2016, p. 103; Mesquita et al. 2019).

2.2 Impact of Brazil's Foreign Policy Traditions on Its Historical View of the World Order

Since the end of the Cold War, Brazil's view of the world order, shaped by its foreign policy traditions, has evolved through four phases. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Brazil saw the world as unipolar, with important but flawed multilateral institutions. While Western leaders expected a liberal, rules-based order to replace traditional geopolitics, Brazilian policymakers were cautious, fearing a unipolar or-

⁶ Until the mid-1960s, most of Brazil's diplomatic corps had legal training, reflecting a tradition established by Ruy Barbosa and underlining Brazil's emphasis on international law.

der with a hegemonic United States⁷ (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2009, p. 3). Because of past negative experiences with U.S. interference⁸ and its commitment to noninterference and self-determination, Brazil had adopted a foreign policy of “autonomy through distance” in the second half of the Cold War, remaining neutral in the superpower rivalry and reluctant to automatically accept prevailing international regimes. Brazil did not adopt the post–Cold War, Western narrative of a “liberal, rules-based” international order. Brazil’s scepticism stemmed from its strong emphasis on respect for international law and the West’s selective adherence to its own rules.⁹ Western activities in the Middle East in the form of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Western involvement in the Syrian civil war since 2011,¹⁰ all without a UN mandate, as well as the adoption of unilateral sanctions and the International Criminal Court’s failure to investigate crimes committed by Western politicians in Iraq and Afghanistan were seen by many emerging countries, including Brazil, as evidence that the rules of the supposedly rules-based order were not universally applied (Dugard 2023, p. 228).

In addition to concerns about inconsistent adherence to international law, Brazil became increasingly vocal in the 1990s and early 2000s about the shortcomings of multilateral institutions, which it deemed crucial for safeguarding its sovereignty. One of the main concerns was the lack of equitable representation, particularly in the UN Security Council, which had been an issue since the creation of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council in 1993. Brazil particularly objected to the veto power held by five states, which could effectively block any resolution and immobilise the main body responsible for global security (Bailey 2011, p. 89). Most recently, in October 2023, President Lula described the veto power as “madness” and “undemocratic” after the United States vetoed a draft resolution proposed by Brazil calling for a humanitarian pause in the conflict in Gaza (Silva 2023).

In the mid-2000s, Brazil’s perception of the post–Cold War order shifted from a unipolar system with important but unrepresentative institutions to a multipolar arrangement. This shift was prompted by the remarkable economic growth and in-

⁷ In 1995, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso recognised the United States as the sole superpower and acknowledged that any potential conflict between Brazil and the United States would be unfavourable for Brazil (Schenoni 2021, p. 67).

⁸ Although historically close to the United States, Brazil grew wary of U.S. influence in its domestic affairs in the 1980s. During a severe economic and social crisis in Brazil, the United States adopted a tougher stance towards its trading partner, including on issues such as information technology and patents, which negatively impacted Brazil and led it to adopt a foreign policy of “autonomy through distance” and focus on developing its domestic market (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007, p. 1313, 2009, p. 130).

⁹ Brazil’s scepticism about the “liberal, rules-based order” narrative was reinforced in the 2000s and 2010s by the slow progress in achieving balanced North–South relations (Stuenkel 2021).

¹⁰ Various actors, not just Western states, have intervened in the Syrian civil war, including Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia, and others. This has led to the characterisation of the Syrian civil war as a series of overlapping proxy wars involving regional and global powers. While the West intervened early in the Syrian civil war by providing political, military, and logistical support to the opposition and allied rebel groups, it was not until September 2014 that a U.S.-led coalition air campaign was launched against the Islamic State and al-Nusra Front.

creased political influence of several emerging economies, including Brazil.¹¹ Brazil began to position itself as a middle power¹² (Flemes 2009). Multipolarity was understood in Brazil to mean that middle powers would have a place at the negotiating table alongside great powers to address critical global issues¹³ (Schenoni 2021, p. 72). Moreover, the United States' withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, refusal to participate in the International Criminal Court, and withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in the early 2000s further undermined its legitimacy as the sole superpower in Brazil's eyes. It also reinforced Brazil's belief in the need for greater participation by emerging powers in the multinational architecture (*ibid.*, p. 164). In response to the shifting power dynamics and with the aim of reforming multilateral institutions, Lula and his successor Dilma Rousseff focused on deepening policy coordination with emerging powers such as China, India, Russia, and South Africa.¹⁴

Despite signs that the world was in fact moving towards bipolarity (Kupchan 2021; Maher 2018) rather than multipolarity, and despite growing Brazilian frustration with the limited progress in reforming international institutions, Brazilian diplomats clung to the concept of multipolarity and the inclusive principle of multilateralism (Vieira de Jesus 2014, p. 20). Schenoni explains this adherence to the multipolar interpretation of the world order by Brazil's "thirst for global recognition" (Schenoni 2021, p. 63).

Under Bolsonaro, Brazil's approach to the international order underwent a significant shift, based on a conservative, antiglobalist, nationalist foreign policy lens. Bolsonaro's simplistic worldview divided nations into two groups: those led by globalists who promoted multiculturalism, which he saw as imposing ideas that ran counter to Brazil's interests, and those led by conservatives who emphasised nationalist and antiglobalist attitudes (Casarões and Barros Leal Farias 2022; Guimarães and de Oliveira e Silva 2021; Loureiro 2023).¹⁵ In contrast to previous Brazilian governments, which sought a multipolar order with a greater influence of middle powers, the Bolsonaro government was not concerned with the notion of the polarity of the international order. Bolsonaro systematically attacked key elements of the "liberal order," from multiculturalism to multilateral organisations like the UN (Casarões 2020), and saw diplomacy as a means of "catering to his constituency

¹¹ Brazil's average annual gross domestic product growth rate rose from 2.10 in the 1980s and 1990s to 3.28 from 2001 to 2013 (World Bank 2023).

¹² Brazil's international status has in the literature most commonly been characterised as middle power or regional power (Gardini 2016, pp. 11–12).

¹³ The term "benign multipolarity," coined by the first foreign minister in the Rousseff administration, underlined Brazil's continued anticipation of a multipolar power structure and the interpretation of it as a positive opportunity. However, Patriota rightly points out that multipolarity does not automatically strengthen multilateralism or improve democratic coexistence within states (De Aguiar Patriota 2023).

¹⁴ At the 15th BRICS summit in Johannesburg in August 2023, an expansion of the group to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates was announced, to take effect on 1 January 2024. This BRICS+ expansion strengthens Brazil's institutional ties with additional emerging powers.

¹⁵ Bolsonaro's alignment with Trump based on shared ideology (Bellieni Zimmermann 2019), and Foreign Minister Araujo's proud justification of being perceived as a pariah for not allying Brazil with the "self-serving cynicism of the globalists," reflect the shift in the view of the global order under Bolsonaro (Fernandes 2020).

and leveraging his own popularity” (Belém Lopes et al. 2022, p. 12). This departure from Brazil’s long-standing foreign policy principles led to a shift from building broad international partnerships to aligning with states governed by ideologically aligned leaders who sought to preserve “traditional values” (Shively and Negreiros Mariano 2022). Furthermore, Brazil’s use of soft power declined under Bolsonaro, and the country’s global influence arguably diminished as its international profile as a mediator and voice of the Global South was dismantled and its leadership positions in areas such as climate change were jettisoned (Buarque 2022, p. 2453).

The inauguration of internationalist President Lula in January 2023 marked a shift in Brazil’s view of the world order, departing from the isolationist strategy of Bolsonaro and reverting to Brazil’s foreign policy traditions. Lula’s administration quickly adopted a more engaged, predictable, and constructive approach to international relations. Lula’s participation in COP27 as president-elect and early visits to long-standing allies signalled Brazil’s renewed commitment to multilateralism, efforts to combat climate change, and assertion of regional leadership. In his inauguration speech, Lula reiterated his enduring vision of a multipolar world with greater democratisation of international relations and expressed his administration’s willingness to engage with all nations (Lula da Silva 2023). However, it is important to recognise the changed global landscape since Lula last held office in 2010. China and India have become more powerful global players, and the relationship between China and the United States has become more antagonistic. Considering these shifts and the additional exogenous shock of Russia’s war on Ukraine, understanding whether and how Brazil’s perspective on the international order has evolved becomes paramount.

2.3 Impact of Brazil’s Foreign Policy Traditions on Its Historical Global Ambitions

Brazil’s foreign policy traditions have shaped not only its historical view of the global order but also its ambitions for its role in it. Guided by the principles of nonintervention and self-determination, Brazil attaches great importance to a non-hegemonic order and the effective functioning of multipolar organisations. Brazil has long seen itself as a staunch defender of multilateralism and an advocate of more democratic multilateral arrangements. Long before the early 2000s, Brazil had expressed concerns about entrenched hierarchies and special privileges for established powers in the global order. Fuelled by economic growth in the early years of the new millennium, Brazil became increasingly emboldened to promote reforms within existing multinational institutions. However, Brazil did not see itself as revisionist, seeking to undermine the existing order, but rather as reconfiguring the multilateral architecture in a more inclusive way.

Relying primarily on its soft power to promote reform of the multilateral architecture, Brazil pursued a two-pronged strategy to enhance its soft power. First, it focused on building coalitions with emerging powers to coordinate policy positions and voice shared concerns about the conceptual, normative, and operational frameworks of multilateral organisations. Second, Brazil increased its participation in UN-led peacekeeping missions and entered into bilateral and multilateral coor-

dination agreements with developing countries (Hirst 2015, p. 359). Brazil used its participation in peacekeeping missions to advocate for principles such as local ownership, nonconditionality, and nonmilitarisation, offering an alternative perspective to the dominant Western-led approach to peacebuilding (Christiansen 2021, p. 26). In the late 2000s, norm entrepreneurship became a third pillar of Brazil's strategy to increase its soft power and promote reform of multilateral institutions.¹⁶

In addition to advocating a more democratic multilateralism, Brazil has also sought to promote a multipolar order, albeit arguably less explicitly. To this end, Brazil pursued a policy of power diffusion between 2003 and 2018. As global economic power became more widely dispersed, Brazil focused on strengthening its ties with other BRICS nations and its South American neighbours, in large part because of their importance to the Brazilian economy (Christensen 2013). Increased South–South cooperation, especially in informal organisations, was also driven by growing frustration with the slow progress in gaining greater recognition in formal organisations.¹⁷ Besides diversifying Brazil's international partnerships, the power diffusion approach also aimed to increase the country's global influence.

In line with the vision of a more multipolar order and the pursuit of power diffusion, Brazil aspired for South America to become a regional pole and for Brazil to play a leading role in the region. While in the 1990s Brazil saw regional infrastructure and energy integration primarily as a catalyst for economic growth (Christensen 2013, p. 273), the 2000s saw a shift in which regional trade and integration were also perceived as mechanisms to increase South America's global weight.¹⁸ Brazil's aspirations as a regional leader were also driven by the potential increase in its soft power as a projector of South American interests in multinational fora (Flemes 2009, p. 167).

Rooted in its foreign policy tradition of peaceful conflict resolution and non-alignment—as well as driven by its aspirations to increase its international influence—Brazil has seen itself as a mediator in international disputes. Its self-perception as a suitable mediator is based on the assumption that perceived impartiality will increase the trust of the conflicting parties in the mediator as well as in Brazil's historical commitment to regional stability. In South America, Brazil has mediated disputes involving countries including Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela (Flemes 2009, p. 167).¹⁹ At the global level, Brazil has also asserted itself in the nuclear talks with Iran, despite U.S. objections (Lula da Silva and Amorim 2020;

¹⁶ For instance, Brazil challenged the conceptual clarity of the UN's Responsibility to Protect principle and introduced the concept of "Responsibility While Protecting" to the Security Council in November 2011, demonstrating its ambition as a global player willing to criticise existing norms and propose alternatives to gain recognition on the global stage (Benner 2013, p. 2).

¹⁷ As Stuenkel points out, from the late 2000s, Brazil increasingly engaged in informal organisations such as BRICS, the IBSA Dialogue Forum, and the G20 to circumvent the slow reform progress in formal organisations (2022, p. 11).

¹⁸ In 2000, then-President Cardoso launched the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America, which laid the foundations for what would become the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

¹⁹ However, Brazil's claim as a regional power and conflict mediator has at times been challenged by Argentina, Chile, and Mexico (Neack 2013, p. 63).

Miller Llana 2010). Given Brazil's historical aspirations for its role on the global stage, it is important to assess whether these have evolved in the wake of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

2.4 Hypotheses

Drawing on Brazil's foreign policy traditions and their implications for Brazil's historical goals for its role in the global order prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I formulate the following three hypotheses:

H1—On the War as a Catalyst for Change in the Global Order Neither the Bolsonaro nor the Lula governments saw Russia's war on Ukraine as a catalyst for fundamental change in the global order, but rather as a disruptive event. In particular, the Lula government saw the war as underlining the limitations of the so-called rules-based order in ensuring global peace and security.

H2—On the Perception of Polarity in the Global Order

- a) The Lula government saw Russia's war against Ukraine as a sign that the world order was becoming increasingly multipolar, with Russia, as one of the main poles, demonstrating its assertiveness by attacking Ukraine despite the expected reactions from the West.
- b) While welcoming the shift away from a U.S. (or Western-led) hegemonic order, the Lula government is concerned about the simultaneous deterioration of great power relations, whose divisive consequences complicate the balancing act for middle powers like Brazil. Russia's war on Ukraine has reinforced Brazil's quest for nonalignment with the great powers.

H3—On Ambitions for Brazil's Role in the Global Order The Lula administration's global ambitions remain unchanged by the Russo-Ukrainian war. Interpreting the war as confirmation of the need to reform the multilateral architecture and believing that Brazil should play a greater role in the reformed framework, the Lula administration seeks to expand Brazil's leadership among middle powers, particularly in South America, to garner more support and consensus for reform.

²⁰ The Brazilian diplomats interviewed included those based in various European countries and the Permanent Mission to the UN, as well as representatives of two different secretariats within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²¹ Eighty percent are Brazilians, and the rest are from other South American countries, the United States, and Europe, either academics working on Brazilian foreign policy or think-tankers from institutions with a South American focus.

3 Research Design

To test the hypotheses, I draw on primary, qualitative data from 34 semistructured interviews with 14 Brazilian diplomats²⁰ and 20 foreign policy experts.²¹ By foreign policy experts, I mean academics, journalists, and think-tankers who closely observe and study Brazilian foreign policy. The interviewees were sampled through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling makes it possible to find interviewees who can provide relevant, information-rich data (Patton 2002, p. 230). Asking interviewees to recommend other relevant participants after the interview (snowball sampling), increased the N of relatively hard-to-reach groups (ibid, p. 237). To capture a broad perspective on Brazilian foreign policy, not only from individuals directly involved in Brazilian foreign policy but also from expert observers who study it closely, I expanded the pool of interviewees beyond diplomats with at least 7 years of experience to include a wide range of foreign policy experts living inside and outside the country. Although gender parity was sought, 79% of the participants were male, partly due to the male-dominated diplomatic profession (Leal and Paranhos 2023; Towns 2017).

The interviews were conducted between early August and late October 2023. Due to financial, geographic, and time constraints, most of the interviews were conducted by video conference. Only the interviews with six diplomats from embassies in three Western European countries were conducted in person. All interviewees agreed to be interviewed. To ensure their anonymity, their names are not given, and no direct quotes are attributed to any interviewee. The interviews were coded using initials associated with the category to which they belonged, either diplomats (DIP) or foreign policy experts (FPE) in order of interview date, as DIP 1–14 and FPE 1–20. I use thematic analysis to extract the themes relevant to the research question from the interview transcripts (Attride-Stirling 2001, p. 387; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). Specifically, I use theoretical or deductive thematic analysis, in which aspects of the data related to the research question are analysed in detail, guided by theory, to identify and describe patterns and to interpret their wider meanings and implications (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 84).

Given that Russia's conflict in Ukraine occurred during Bolsonaro's last year in office before President Lula's inauguration in January 2023, I examine how both administrations responded to the conflict. These responses provide insights into their respective interpretations of the conflict and its perceived impact on the global order. However, with regard to the main research question of whether and how the war against Ukraine has shaped Brazil's perspective on the international order, I focus on the Lula administration as the current government, which is expected to remain in office until 2026 and is likely to influence Brazilian foreign policy for the foreseeable future.

The research design has several shortcomings. First, it is based on interviews conducted in real time during Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine. As such, these interviews reflect perceptions of a dynamic that is still unfolding. The findings of this study may therefore only capture how the Brazilian government's view of the international order has evolved in response to Russia's war in Ukraine up to a certain point and may need to be updated. In addition, the interviews with diplomats may

sometimes have reflected personal opinions rather than the official government interpretation of the world order, which may have biased the results. However, because interviews with Brazilian foreign policy observers accounted for nearly 60% of all interviews, I was able to triangulate the diplomats' responses and gain a comprehensive understanding of the Brazilian government's view of the impact of Russia's war on Ukraine on the international order. Moreover, the diplomats' personal opinions, which were sometimes added, were enriching because they revealed contradictions in the Brazilian government's aspirations for its role on the global stage and provided assessments of the feasibility of these aspirations. Finally, the study is based on a small, albeit rich, sample of 34 interviews. While there are no rules about sample size in qualitative research (Patton 2002, p. 244), I reached a level of "saturation" in the interviews where no new information emerged towards the end of the interview process. I also supplemented the data from the interviews with a review of public speeches by Brazilian politicians and diplomats and statements made during the general debate at the UN General Assembly.

4 Results

4.1 The War as a Disruptive Force Highlighting the "Rules-Based" System's Shortcomings

In line with Brazil's formal position, reflected in its vote in UN resolutions condemning Russia's invasion, and despite the at times ambiguous positions of its leaders,²² all Brazilian diplomats interviewed described the war as a violation of international law. "Russia has clearly violated Ukraine's territorial integrity. Brazil has called it an invasion and has twice voted in favour of UN resolutions condemning Russia," noted one diplomat (DIP2). In addition, Brazilian diplomats and foreign policy experts have characterised the war as a "major disruption" (DIP3), a "serious breach of the world order" (DIP8), and "a major security crisis with global implications" (FPE7). Beyond the obvious human suffering and displacement of affected populations, they recognised the war's devastating impact on global energy and food markets. Nevertheless, the war was perceived primarily as a regional war with limited consequences for Brazil. "Because Brazil's agricultural sector is so dependent on fertiliser imports, especially from Russia, there were concerns about security of supply," said one think-tanker (FPE4), explaining the feared disruptive impact on Brazil. Another diplomat echoed this, stating that "Bolsonaro's main concern following Russia's invasion of Ukraine was the potential disruptive effect on fertiliser prices and supply, given his strong support from the agribusiness sector" (DIP9). In a statement to reporters during a visit to the state of Maranhão, Bolsonaro qualified

²² In February 2022, Bolsonaro refused to publicly condemn Russia's behaviour. In May 2022, Lula, then a presidential candidate, said that the leaders of Russia and Ukraine were equally responsible for the war. In April 2023, he suggested that Ukraine should consider giving up Crimea to negotiate peace with Russia, and in September 2023 he suggested that Putin would not be arrested if he attended the G20 meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 2024.

the disruptive effect by suggesting that “this war has caused huge disruptions—less for Brazil, much more for Europe” (Reuters 2022). The Lula administration is perceived to hold similar views, as one diplomat suggests: “Lula also sees the war primarily as a European war, with immediate consequences in that region and, after a year and a half, fewer global consequences” (DIP 12). This is further supported by an academic’s assessment that “Brazilian policymakers see the war as a European war and the attempt to turn it into a global war as unacceptable” (FP4).

The limits of the disruptive, albeit mainly regional, war were also underlined by the perceived high degree of continuity in the functioning of intergovernmental forums and communications despite the war. As a member of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry’s Secretariat for Europe pointed out, “The G20 summit in New Delhi reflected a great deal of continuity in the functioning of intergovernmental forums and relations. Despite obvious disagreements over the war in Ukraine, the international agenda was not held hostage by the war. The leaders of the major powers recognise the many pressing issues that need to be addressed urgently” (DIP4). Another diplomat added, “The war in Ukraine presents a challenge in terms of how global issues are addressed and has made consensus-building more difficult, but it has not led to a fundamental change in the channels or means of intergovernmental communication; they remain open despite the obvious disagreements in the context of the war” (DIP7).

In addition to viewing the war as disruptive, but not a catalyst for fundamental change in the global order, Brazilian foreign policy experts emphasised that the Brazilian government, particularly under Lula’s leadership, saw the war as a relatively common occurrence in recent history. As one diplomat remarked, “Many conflicts persist around the world without generating the level of outrage seen in Europe” (DIP10). Similarly, another diplomat stated that “it is important to stress that the war is just one of many violations of international law committed by members of the Security Council in recent years” (DIP2). Two-thirds of the foreign policy experts interviewed also cited other violations of international law, such as the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq or the 2011 intervention in Libya,²³ as examples of illegal behaviour comparable to Russia’s attack on Ukraine.

Based on their perception of the war in Ukraine as one of many recent violations of international law by a member of the Security Council and the inability of the UN body to respond effectively to the conflict, Brazilian diplomats and foreign policy experts alike interpreted the war as indicative of the inadequacy of the current international order. In particular, they point to the paralysing effect of the veto power of the five permanent members (P5) on Security Council action, resulting in the failure of the UN rules governing the use of force:

“Above all, the crisis shows how ineffective the Security Council is in its current configuration. Not only is it not representative of a new world order, but the veto

²³ It is debatable whether the UN-authorized military intervention in Libya in 2011 was a violation of international law. Critics argue that the UN’s Responsibility to Protect mandate to protect civilians in Libya was overstretched, as the NATO operation facilitated regime change (Simonsen 2016).

power of the permanent members is detrimental to ensuring global peace and security” (DIP1).

“The so-called rules-based order does not exist. Multilateral institutions are not working to uphold international rules. The war in Ukraine is a clear demonstration that the world order fails us when there is any kind of serious disruption of the order or when rules are violated. The world order seems incapable of adapting to and reversing the paralysing situation” (FPE2).

Furthermore, the interviewees stressed the need for reform, acknowledging that the “conflict makes it more transparent that the system [specifically the Security Council] requires restructuring” (FP1). At the same time, they acknowledged the inherent challenges of reform due to “the built-in characteristic that the P5 would have to agree to a reform that would weaken their influence and contradict their vested interests” (FP4) and the “current situation that is unfavourable to reform with the polarisation and lack of P5 consensus on many issues of the international agenda” (DIP3).

The views of diplomats and foreign policy experts on Russia’s war on Ukraine and its consequences, presented above, suggest support for the first hypothesis. The interviewees expressed that both Brazilian governments under Bolsonaro and Lula did not see the war as having triggered a major change in the global order. They acknowledged its disruptive effect, primarily in Europe, but also to some extent globally through its impact on energy and food markets. However, they emphasised the relative degree of continuity in the day-to-day workings of intergovernmental fora and communications. Moreover, the discussions revealed that the war is seen primarily as yet another sign of the dysfunction of the global order, its inability to respond to rule-breaking, and the urgent need to reform it.

4.2 The War as a Sign of Existing or Emerging Multipolarity

In addition to seeing the war as a sign of the ineffectiveness of the current global order and of the need for reform, some diplomats suggested that the Lula administration also took it as evidence of a shift towards a multipolar world. “Lula has made his position clear; he sees the war in Ukraine as further evidence of an increasingly multipolar order, as Russia has repeatedly acted without regard for international law and the repercussions from the rest of the world” (DIP1). “We are moving towards a multipolar world, and Russia’s war is a sign of this for Itamaraty,”²⁴ echoed another diplomat (DIP8).

Despite four such unprompted statements by diplomats, the evidence that the Lula administration sees Russia’s war against Ukraine as a sign of an increasingly multipolar order remains inconclusive. No public statements by Lula were found in which he explicitly linked Russian aggression in Ukraine to the multipolarity of the global order. Only half of the foreign policy experts who were asked specifically about this agreed that the Lula administration saw the war as an indicator of a shift

²⁴ The Itamaraty Palace in Brasilia is the headquarters of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and thus a reference to the Ministry.

towards multipolarity. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Lula administration generally sees a global trend towards multipolarity. In October 2022, in a column published in *Le Monde* outlining the plans of his future administration, Lula stated that “we believe in a multipolar world” (Lula da Silva 2022). “The Brazilian government believes that a multipolar world is emerging,” confirms a Brazilian think-tanker (FPE4). A diplomat explained that the Lula government recognises that the United States and China are the main poles with the most significant hard power in the current world order but that other poles such as Russia and India have emerged and carry weight. The situation differs from the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War in that “neither the U.S. nor China has the influence to lead a large bloc of coalitions, as evidenced by the Global South’s largely neutral response to Russia’s war in Ukraine, and the international agenda currently being set by a variety of actors, each with their own weight” (DIP4). Discussions of Brazil’s neutral stance have also revealed that one of the reasons for Brazil’s reluctance to take sides is that it sees “a defeat of Russia as detrimental to the current multipolar order, which relies on the existence of several strong poles” (FPE11). “For Lula, Russia should be an important power in a multipolar world,” concurred a think-tanker (FPE13).

While welcoming the shift towards multipolarity,²⁵ the Lula government appears to be moderately concerned about the decline in great power relations following Russia’s war on Ukraine, with the main concern being the potential risk of geo-economic fragmentation. During the war, a political constellation of three groups emerged: those supporting Ukraine, those aligned with Russia, and those resisting any involvement (Coles et al. 2023). Discussions with Brazilian diplomats and foreign policy experts suggest that the Lula administration is not overly concerned about the deepening rift between the great power axes as such, but recognises the risks of economic fragmentation, particularly for trade and technology:

“A stronger transatlantic alliance was to be expected in the wake of the war, as was some degree of Russian and Chinese cohesion. In an increasingly multipolar world, we do not see the decline in great power competition as particularly worrying. What matters to us is that there are other poles besides the U.S. and China,” noted one diplomat (DIP3).

“Brazil is not very concerned about the divisive consequences of the war and does not see them as complicating the balancing act of middle powers like Brazil,” said a journalist (FPE12).

“Despite the decline in great power relations, we see continuity in the work of intergovernmental fora. Continued dialogue is key to putting pressing issues on the international agenda. While not a major concern for us, the deterioration in great power relations poses a risk of geopolitical fragmentation of the international monetary system,” reiterated another diplomat (DIP5).

In addition to the perception that the Lula administration is only moderately concerned about the deterioration in great power relations that has been exacerbated

²⁵ As evidenced by Lula’s statements during his previous two terms in office and in the run-up to his third term, such as at COP27 in November 2022, where he claimed to be working to build a global order that “is peaceful and based on dialogue, multilateralism and multipolarity” (Osborn 2022).

by the war, the interviewees' statements also suggest that the current government does not perceive this deterioration as complicating the balancing act of foreign policy. "In line with Brazil's diplomatic tradition, the current government does not feel obliged to align itself with any of the axes," suggests a journalist (FPE11). "It is unacceptable for Brazil to have to choose between different axes; it should be able to be flexible and look for intermediate paths," explains a think-tanker (FPE13). A diplomat expressed frustration at the idea that Brazil could be pressured to align itself with one of the major powers: "The notion that Brazil has to choose is deeply offensive to most Brazilian diplomats; Brazilians value the ability to manoeuvre" (DIP1). In his inauguration speech in January 2023, Lula expressed his intention to mature existing partnerships with Western partners as well as with developing countries of the Global South, reflecting that he is not thinking in terms of alignment with one of the great powers and its allies.²⁶

The current Brazilian government's view that active nonalignment makes strategic sense, rooted in the principle of nonintervention, is reflected in its response to the Russo-Ukrainian war and the BRICS expansion. One Brazilian academic suggested that Brazil is deliberately pursuing an ambiguous strategy by sending double signals, as it did after the start of the Ukraine war and more recently after the announcement of the BRICS expansion, when Brazil announced its "intention to form a coalition within a coalition with other democracies such as India and South Africa to signal to the West that while Brazil will continue to work closely with China as part of BRICS, it remains committed to the values of liberal democracy" (FPE2). While several diplomats supported the notion that the Lula administration "can take advantage of dealing with both sides without alignment" (DIP4) and that it "can hedge between China and the U.S." (DIP5), three foreign policy experts questioned the extent to which the Lula administration is currently doing this. Statements such as "there are few signs that the Brazilian government is actively hedging; it is rather reacting to scenarios" (FPE2) and "the Lula administration does not seem to have a clear hedging strategy with the aim of extracting concessions" (FPE13) suggest that despite the government's nonalignment, it is not actively hedging.

Based on the limited evidence that Lula views Russia's war on Ukraine as a manifestation of a shift towards an increasingly multipolar order, since only a third of the diplomats interviewed raised this unprompted and few foreign policy experts confirmed it, and in the absence of a statement by Lula that reflects his position that the war is a reflection of increased multipolarity, hypothesis 2a remains plausible but can neither be confirmed nor rejected. Hypothesis 2b, on the other hand, which suggests that the Lula administration is concerned about the decline of great power relations following Russia's war on Ukraine and fears a more difficult balancing act due to increased pressure to align itself with one of the major poles, can be rejected based on the results of the interviews. Although fears of potential geo-economic fragmentation have been raised, the evidence provided by interviewees supports the

²⁶ Specifically, Lula said, "We will seek a mature partnership with the U.S., based on mutual interest and mutual respect. We will seek to strengthen understanding and cooperation with the EU and its member states, as well as with other important developed countries such as Japan. We will deepen relations with major developing nations: China, India, Russia, South Africa, among others" (Lula da Silva 2023, p. 10).

view that the Lula administration is not overly concerned with the decline of great power relations in the wake of the war. Its commitment to active nonalignment remains unchanged.

4.3 Brazil's Plans to Push for a Reformed Multilateral Architecture with a Greater Brazilian Voice

Interpreting Russia's war on Ukraine as a symptom of the dysfunction of the multilateral architecture, Brazil sees this as confirmation of the need for reform and a greater Brazilian voice in global affairs. "Brazil wants a reformed arrangement that reflects the current power dynamics and its place within it," suggests one diplomat (DIP6). "Brazil wants the Global South to play a greater role and for decisions in global affairs to be made and enforced multilaterally," affirms a Brazilian academic (FPE10). More than 80% of interviewees made an unprompted reference to Brazil's continued pursuit of reform of the dysfunctional order, although some noted that despite more democratic principles, greater representation, and adherence to international law, there is no clear plan or consensus among Brazilian policymakers as to what a reformed multilateral order should look like. "Brazil wants to be a pole in the multipolar order, but it does not have a clear plan on how to push for the necessary reforms," said one academic (FPE6). In terms of pushing for reform of existing multilateral institutions, the experts interviewed see Brazil's foreign policy ambitions as unchanged but reinforced by Russia's war on Ukraine.

Informal organisations are becoming increasingly important to the Lula administration in its efforts to promote reform and increase Brazil's international influence. The statements of the experts interviewed echoed Stuenkel's (2022) argument that Brazil's embrace of informal organisations was largely driven by frustration with the slow pace of reform and wounded pride at Western claims that Brazil was not ready for a seat at the table. "BRICS is seen as an increasingly important forum to increase Brazil's clout and build consensus for reform," noted a Brazilian think-tanker (FPE1), while a diplomat asserted that "Brazil needs to be involved in informal organisations like BRICS and the G20 because they provide a forum where countries of some weight can interact and effectively address issues of global importance" (DIP6).

In addition to prioritising informal organisations as a means of garnering support for reform and enhancing Brazil's global influence, the current administration is also placing emphasis on areas where Brazil is already recognised as a significant global actor, such as environmental legislation, efforts to combat climate change, and inclusive social development. "In its efforts to play a greater role on the world stage, Brazil wants to play to its strengths and focus on the strategic issues where it carries weight," suggested one diplomat (DIP9). However, the first nine months of Lula's presidency have shown that he intends for Brazil to have a voice on a wide range of global matters to establish the country as a more influential presence on the world stage, as evidenced by his move to position Brazil as a potential mediator in Russia's war against Ukraine. There was no shortage of experts interviewed who criticised Lula's approach, suggesting that Brazil should focus on those issues where it has a strategic advantage to bolster its international clout and only propose well-

considered (peace) initiatives. Criticism was also directed at the fact that Lula had not yet announced a qualified Brazilian mediator or presented a concrete plan for such a mediation process.

Another foreign policy focus of the Lula administration is the reintegration of South America after the political fragmentation and extinction of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in recent years (Barros and Borba Goncalves 2021). “Brazil wants South America to become a more integrated region again” (DIP6) and a “stronger pole in a multipolar order” (DIP1), two diplomats noted. The foreign policy experts went further, suggesting more explicitly that the Lula administration is actively seeking a leadership role within South America to also enhance Brazil’s soft-power standing in the world. “Lula is trying to lead multilaterally in South America and rebuild UNASUR” claimed a Brazilian think-tanker (FPE4), while a journalist noted that “Lula wants to turn South America into a bloc under Brazilian leadership to strengthen its international position” (FPE11). These statements reflect the importance Brazil attaches to South American reintegration as part of its broader foreign policy goals of increasing Brazil’s voice in the world and pushing for reform of the multilateral architecture.

The evidence discussed above largely supports the third hypothesis. Diplomats and foreign policy experts alike have confirmed that the Lula administration’s foreign policy goals have remained relatively unchanged by Russia’s war against Ukraine. Rather, the war, which is seen as symptomatic of the dysfunctional multilateral architecture, has reinforced Brazil’s resolve to push for reform and increase its influence within a reformed framework. Moreover, informal organisations are expected to continue to play an important role in Brazil’s reform drive. Similarly, Brazil’s foreign policy strategy and intergovernmental engagement will continue to focus on thematic issues where it has strategic leverage. In terms of Brazil’s aspirations for South America, Brazil sees South America as an important pole in a multipolar world, which explains its efforts to promote greater regional integration. The extent to which Brazil seeks to be the voice of the South American region versus a voice of the region remains inconclusive based on the expert discussions.

5 Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, which many Western policymakers believe has triggered a shift in the global order and deepened the divide between Western nations and many in the Global South, this paper sought to examine whether and how the war has influenced Brazil’s perspective on the international order and its aspirations for its global role. With the transition of power from Bolsonaro, who was seen as lacking a clear foreign policy agenda and damaging Brazil’s international reputation, to Lula, coupled with the frequent misunderstanding of Brazil’s response to the Russo-Ukrainian war by many Western policymakers, it is crucial to analyse whether the current Brazilian government’s assessment of the world order and its desired role in it has changed.

The analysis suggests that Brazil did not see Russia’s war as triggering a significant shift in the global order, but rather as a symptom of a widespread perception

in the Global South that the “rules-based order” is not working to address global challenges and disruptions, be it the COVID-19 pandemic, the fight against climate change, or the resolution of a war on European territory. For decades, Brazil has sought a fairer, multipolar world order governed by international law. Whether the Lula administration saw the war as a sign that the world is increasingly moving towards multipolarity remains unclear from the interviews. The decline in great power relations, exacerbated by the Russo-Ukrainian war, appears to be of moderate concern to Brazil, which does not see it as complicating its balancing act. Brazil’s quest for strategic nonalignment has only been reinforced by the war, although some experts have noted that Brazil is not yet hedging effectively to maximise concessions from the great powers. Consistent with the notion that Brazil’s view of the global order remains relatively unchanged in the wake of the war, Brazil has not revised its envisioned global power role. Viewing the war as a confirmation of the need to reform the multilateral architecture, Brazil has been emboldened to actively promote reform processes and build consensus among countries in the Global South. Engagement in informal organisations and on issues such as climate change and inclusive social development, where Brazil has influence, is expected to be crucial to Brazil’s efforts to increase its soft power and promote institutional reform.

Because the expert interviews were conducted between August and October 2023, perceptions of the impact of Russia’s war on Ukraine may evolve as dynamics unfold. Furthermore, the findings of this study reflect only the perceptions of diplomats and foreign policy experts and observers. Future research could focus on a larger number of senior Brazilian foreign policymakers and assess the extent to which their views of the international order and Brazil’s global aspirations align with the assessments of the foreign policy experts interviewed in this study. An analysis of the Brazilian government’s communication of its foreign policy objectives, especially in the absence of a formal security or foreign policy strategy, could further complement the understanding of Brazil’s view of the international order—and its role in it. Moreover, future research might also focus on the policy options of the current Lula administration and their feasibility in effectively promoting reform of multilateral organisations, given that the world is very different from when Lula was last in office.

Acknowledgements First and foremost, I would like to thank the Brazilian diplomats and foreign policy experts who kindly gave their time and shared their insights and expertise in the primary interviews. I would also like to thank the two guest editors of this special volume for their critical review and constructive feedback. Equally, I am indebted to the two anonymous reviewers who provided detailed comments that helped to improve the article. Finally, I would like to thank Oxford’s Department of Politics and International Relations and Lincoln College for funding the travel costs of the primary interviews.

Conflict of interest L. Schorlemer declares that she has no competing interests.

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