

Leaping Jaguar, Crouching Tiger: Comparing the Strategic Culture of Brazil and India¹

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Abstract

Based on the premise that each country has a particular way of interpreting and reacting to international events, the study of strategic culture provides an important analytical tool for understanding and explaining how countries see the world and what drives their foreign policy practices and preferences. Considering that the rise of emerging powers has the potential to affect the balance of power in the international system, this article examines and compares the strategic culture of two of the most important emerging countries in the world, Brazil and India. While apparently exhibiting completely different patterns of strategic thinking, which have led them to pursue different approaches to reach their objectives, these two states share a belief that they are predestined to “greatness,” to play a more significant role in their regional contexts, and to become major stakeholders in global affairs. As the largest countries in their respective regions, Brazil and India can help to shape the future of Latin America and South Asia. Their international behaviour can not only condition the foreign, security and domestic policies and strategies of their neighbours but also impact the ambitions of extra-regional powers with a stake in those regions. Analyzing the strategic culture of these two countries can therefore help policymakers and scholars to understand the rationale for their perceptions and ambitions, what influences and drives their foreign and security policies, how they see the world and why they behave the way they do.

Key words: Brazil; India, strategic culture; foreign policy

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Introduction

In recent years, the world has witnessed the emergence of Brazil and India as significant actors in the international system. As the largest countries in their respective regions, Brazil and India can help to shape the future of Latin America and South Asia. As both states have experienced substantial growth in their prominence and capabilities, there is an increasing desire to understand, and possibly predict, how they will behave in strategic matters, comprising their military and foreign policy.

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Due to their economic, demographic, political and even military capabilities and resources, their international behaviour can not only condition the foreign, security and domestic policies and strategies of their neighbours but also impact the ambitions of extra-regional powers with a stake in those regions. Analyzing these two countries' strategic culture can therefore help policymakers and scholars to understand the rationale behind their perceptions and ambitions, what influences and drives their foreign and security policies, how they see the world and why they behave the way they do.

Brazil is the world's fifth-largest country after Russia, Canada, China, and the United States², while India, which is about a third of Brazil's size, ranks seventh. In terms of population, with 1.3 billion people — and growing — India is the second-most populous country after China, while Brazil is fifth with a population of over 220 million. When it comes to political systems, both countries are considered vibrant democracies, imperfect as they might be, with India being the largest democracy in the world and Brazil the fourth largest.

The magnitude of those numbers reflects the scale of the challenges faced by those states. As developing countries, they need to overcome urgent structural issues which undermine their potential. Widespread corruption and high levels of illiteracy still plague them. High levels of “poverty, regional income and economic inequalities, overexposure to commodities and dependence on commodities exports, dependence of foreign direct investments, vulnerability to asset bubbles, poor institutional and regulatory quality, and a relatively small opening to the global economy” [Degaut, 2015, p. 4] are some of the negative characteristics shared by these giant countries.

However, besides the argument that both states are “undergoing a military modernization effort aimed at preserving their strategic interests” [Darling, 2010], what other common traits can be, from a more strategic perspective, associated with them? Considering that the rise of emerging powers has the potential to affect the balance of power in the international system, whether regionally or, in some cases, globally, this article examines and compares the strategic culture of these two important rising countries. While exhibiting completely different patterns of strategic thinking, reflected in — and stemming from — different cultural and social traditions, world views, and foreign policy practices and

² Combined, Brazil's 27 states are bigger than the contiguous United States.

priorities, which have led them to pursue different paths and approaches to reach their objectives, Brazil and India share a belief that they are predestined to “greatness,” to play a larger role in their respective regional contexts, and to become major stakeholders in global affairs.

Considering the relevance of Brazil and India to the international system, identifying and analyzing the nature of their strategic culture is of fundamental importance to understanding the logic that has driven the evolution of their geopolitical views, military doctrines, and foreign policy behaviours, practices and preferences. Perhaps most importantly, it helps to explain their claims for a greater voice in global affairs and their quest for greatness. Likewise, when one considers that, as emerging powers move closer to achieving global player status, their strategic preferences could eventually have game-changing effects on the international stage, discussing such issues becomes even more important.

This article first presents an operational concept of strategic culture and briefly discusses why more traditional and dominant modes of analyzing the strategic behaviour of middle powers like Brazil and India — such as neoliberal institutionalism, offensive realism and rational choice institutionalism (RCI) — are not the most appropriate ones to analyze the evolution of Brazilian and Indian security and foreign policy practices. It then discusses the main characteristics of India’s strategic culture, and its influence upon the country’s security and foreign policy decision-making process. The same methodology is applied in a discussion of Brazilian strategic culture. Finally, a brief conclusion addresses how what can be considered the traditional strategic cultures of Brazil and India have not only historically helped to shape those countries’ security and foreign policies, concerns, behaviours and preferences but also, and perhaps most importantly, formed the strategic framework within which diplomacy has operated, thoughts debated, lines of action devised, and decisions implemented.

Why the Strategic Culture Approach?

Questions regarding how and why states behave and will behave in the international system lie at the very heart of International Relations (IR). More specifically, national security, a concept that can be broadly understood as not only the ability of a state to provide for the defence and protection of its territory, institutions, citizenry and capabilities in the domestic

sphere but also to pursue its interests abroad, has traditionally been one of the main policy issues and one of the most important subjects that states have to address.

More traditional and dominant IR theories, such as neoliberal institutionalism, offensive realism and RCI, are often used to analyze and describe the behaviour of actors in the field of security. Over time, however, as the international security environment has endured structural changes brought about by the emergence of phenomena such as globalization, regional integration and terrorism, among others, such theoretical perspectives are not the most appropriate ones to analyze and explain national security policy patterns in a fundamentally changing and more dynamic international system [Lantis, 2002]. In the same vein, a “key problem with traditional modes is that they cannot explain why there are differences in states’ security policies [...] although they have similar capabilities and face similar conditions and constraints in their international environment” [Mirow, 2009, p. 1].

Certainly, no theoretical perspective is perfect. Every approach has its strengths and shortcomings. Although it is not in the scope of this work to detail the strengths and vulnerabilities of the aforementioned perspectives, they fall short of capturing the full gamut of motivations behind the strategic and foreign policy behaviour of middle powers like Brazil and India.

The linear predictions of those rational choice theories of what is to come, for example, which start from similar assumptions but reach entirely opposite conclusions, are equal in the sense that they tend to be overly deterministic, turning what would be a possible future into an inevitable one, leaving no room for alternative scenarios. The evolution of Brazilian and Indian security and foreign policy thinking and practices, for example, defies that narrow theoretical pigeonholing. The strategic culture approach, on the other hand, suggests but does not determine what should be expected from an actor, what the available options are or what courses of action are appropriate or considered feasible.

Likewise, none of these major theories is able to account for intangible aspects such as identity, values and traditions to either predict the future or explain the past. On the other hand, strategic culture can provide a bridge between ideational and material interpretations of state behaviour, simultaneously challenging and enriching those perspectives. For this reason, this article argues that, in spite of its gaps, the strategic culture approach explains Brazil’s and India’s geopolitical thought and, consequently, their foreign policy interests, priorities and behaviour, as well as their proclivity to use force, better than other competing theoretical

approaches. Understanding intangible factors such as identity, beliefs, values, traditions, action and discourse allows scholars and policymakers to take account of the issues to which the actors are reacting, as well as the impact of experience on their foreign and security policies.

This does not mean that the strategic culture approach is the sole perspective that can provide a realistic explanation for a state's behaviour in the international scenario in any particular instance. However, its potential explanatory power can offer substantial room for progressive study of strategic choice, has the potential to be a valuable policy instrument and can "do a much better job of explaining how the world works" [Desch, 1998, p. 141]; it should not, therefore, be understated.

In fact, in a historical moment where new threats to security and global stability are emerging, compelling states to revise, update and adapt their foreign policies and security strategies, the strategic culture approach has at least three potential contributions to make, particularly — but not only — when supplementing more traditional theories:

First, cultural variables may explain the lag between structural change and alterations in state behavior. Second, they may account for why some states behave irrationally and suffer the consequences of failing to adapt to the constraints of the international system. Finally, in structurally indeterminate situations, domestic variables such as culture may have a more independent impact [Desch, 2005, p. 3].

In that regard, the impact that ideational, cultural and normative elements can have on the motivations of states and their leaders has become more apparent in a significant number of recent international events, triggering a renewed scholarly interest in the role of culture in global security. Moscow's support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine, the threat from terrorism and radical Islamic movements, the rise of the BRICS group of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the interventions in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Syrian civil war, as well as the tensions on the Korean Peninsula, among other developments, have led analysts, decision makers and the academic community to try to interpret international issues through the lens of national culture and identity.

Broadly understood as a deeply held cultural predisposition for a particular strategic behaviour or strategic thinking, strategic culture is a product of geographic circumstances and historical experiences, both internal and external, domestic and foreign, which influence the way policymakers and strategists think about matters of war and peace. The subjective perception of a state regarding its own security and eventual threats to it, as well as the

reaction patterns regarding such threat-perceptions, for example, is significantly influenced by its strategic culture. More than an alternative way of explaining strategic behaviour, the strategic culture approach seeks to explain what constrains actors from taking certain strategic decisions, how they legitimize their foreign policy discourse and behaviour, whether they explore causal explanations for regular patterns of state action, and their attempts to derive generalizations from its conclusions. A deeper understanding of cultural variables can, therefore, help to design and develop courses of action, anticipate possible scenarios, reduce policy failures and advance national interests.

Interaction among those elements can help forge a collective sense of national identity and strategic perceptions distinct from other states, while also limiting the social and cultural milieu in which strategic decisions are made. Strategic culture can therefore be seen as resulting from a peculiar set of beliefs, values, assumptions, perceptions and behaviour patterns that have been socialized, legitimized and, finally, incorporated into the political practices, moral codes and social mores of a given society — particularly of members of the foreign policy and national security establishment — regarding how a state views international politics and the means through which it tends to define and pursue its foreign policy and national security objectives. Through those social, cultural and political mechanisms, beliefs, preferences and practices have, over time, achieved “a state of semi-permanence that places them on the level of ‘culture’ rather than policy” [Snyder, 1977, p. 8].

It must be noted, however, that the strategic culture approach is in itself not just about how culture or cultural variables influence strategic policy output, which would be of very little use, since, as C. S. Gray [1999, p. 50] observes, “all strategic behavior is affected by humans who cannot help but be cultural agents.” Likewise, over-reliance on cultural variables, without the support of theoretically consistent and empirically solid arguments, can undermine the explanatory power of any analytical framework, rendering it a victim of a cultural particularism that manifests itself in *Deus ex machina* explanations. In that context, B. Moore [1967, p. 485] reminds us that “the weakness of the cultural explanation is not in the statement of such facts [...] but in the way they are put into the explanation.”

On the other hand, the strategic culture approach emphasizes decision-making. This perspective carries in itself the semantic element “strategic,” a term intimately connected to statecraft, and more particularly to diplomacy and military strategy. This approach is, in fact, about the culture of strategic decision-making, as it informs the thinking and reasoning of a

country's policymakers, and about the processes through which these understandings engender decisions regarding the pursuit of foreign policy and national security objectives. It therefore tends to reflect the rationale behind the preference for specific courses of action or for the adoption of specific policies to address a given issue.

This theoretical framework assumes that patterns of political thought and behaviour — particularly regarding national security and foreign policy — are not uniform around the world. Therefore, historical memories, traditions and experiences shared by the people and, more importantly, the ruling classes of a state constitute the basic pillars of its strategic culture. However, since members of the elites cannot realistically formulate a strategic culture out of the nothing and then impose it upon the people, that strategic culture “must be in resonance with the people's historical experience and conscious or subconscious collective memory” [Liebig, 2016]. In that sense, A. Toje [2009, p. 4] argues that “generated at the crossroads of history, capabilities, geopolitics and values, strategic culture is an aggregate level of the most influential voices in terms of attitudes and behaviors,” which can generate a feedback loop that influences the nature and meaning of not only ideational variables but also material ones.

In this context, some contemporary scholarship advocates the idea that the strategic culture approach offers highly relevant perspectives on foreign policy decision-making, grand strategy, strategic behaviour, preferences and choices, and military doctrine, since, by applying that approach to certain cases, scholars have been trying to explain continuity and change in a country's foreign and national security policies. J. S. Duffield [1999], for example, argues that the foreign policy goals that are to be pursued by a state, which reflect its identity and interests, are defined by its strategic culture, while B. S. Klein [1988] acknowledges that variable as being a product of historical experience. Since these experiences differ across states, different states create different strategic cultures. In the same line of thinking, A. I. Johnston [1995, p. 34] claims that “different states have different predominant strategic preferences that are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree by the philosophical, political, cultural and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites.”

The literature on the subject, however, is limited by a substantial focus on major powers, particularly the American, Russian and Chinese cases. By studying this perspective through the experiences of emerging countries, this article bridges an important gap,

diversifies the literature and enriches the understanding of the sources of strategic culture and its implications to a country's foreign and security policies.

Indian Strategic Culture: Main Features

Discerning the underlying traits of India's strategic culture is not an easy task due to the extreme diversity of Indian society, marked by ethnic, religious, linguistic, genetic, caste and regional differences. However, the foundational text on politico-strategic affairs generated in the Indian geocultural space, with a remarkable impact on the formation of the country's strategic culture, can be found in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, a more than 2000-year-old treatise on statecraft and politics. Although the age-old popular Indian mythology is strongly based on great epics, such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, "at the very least, Indians have not recorded their strategic thinking in written texts, the only exception being the ancient classic, *Arthashastra*" [Bajpai, 2002, p. 246]. Likewise, R. Das [2010, p. 480] argues that "the strategic protocols laid in the *Arthashastra* have formed the corpus from which India's strategic community has drawn their notions of national security," despite the presence of strong "symbolism of pre-modern Indian state systems and threads of Hindu or Vedic civilization dating back several millennia" [Jones, 2006, p. 3].

Basically, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is about grand strategy, encompassing a wide range of subjects from public administration, governance and economic policy to foreign policy and military affairs. Grand strategy can be understood here as a practical exercise based on the "calculated relationship of means to large ends" [Gaddis, 2009, p. 7], in which intentions are related to capabilities, and objectives are related to resources. It seeks to align a country's power with its interests and orchestrates ends, ways and means.

To R. W. Jones [2006, p. 8], the *Arthashastra*, "closely parallels Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, as an exposition of monarchical statecraft, realpolitik in inter-state balances of power, and the practices of war and peace." In this line of reasoning, to the Kautilyan state, the most important national security and foreign policy objective is the political, and possibly territorial, unification of the Indian subcontinent. Its paradigm is driven by an early kind of political realism whose underlying premise is the competitive and conflictual nature of the international system, in a scenario in which interstate relations are established based on a correlation of forces in terms of power.

In a context where the essence of Indian foreign and security policies lies in its quest for strategic autonomy, the core concepts of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* provide some of the basic philosophical and mythological features and assumptions of Indian strategic culture, which include — but are not limited to — an inclination toward a tradition of realpolitik, the strong presence of nationalism as a central component of Indian national identity, the inviolability of the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the strengthening of the role of the state in ensuring economic and social progress and in mobilizing productive, political and cultural forces, as well as the preservation, promotion and pursuit of the state's interests according to *raison d'état*.

Different from the Brazilian case, traditional Indian strategic culture puts a premium on material resources of leadership, indicating its preference for strategies that favour power politics and the development of hard power capabilities. Such a statement does not mean that India is an aggressive or bellicose state. Rather, it reflects a deep-rooted belief in Indian politico-military circles that the chaotic and competitive nature of the international system, as well as its asymmetric character, is a source of instability that determines the status of countries and limits their options of strategic choices. Consequently, the willingness to provoke changes in the status quo demands the development of strong economic, political, military and diplomatic capabilities, in a scenario where the state has the moral duty of cultivating power in order to pursue its interests.

Coexisting with the Kautilyan realpolitik framework, there is what can be considered a tradition of idealism in the Indian statecraft experience. Such a tradition is based on the teachings of Gautama Buddha (c. 563 BCE/480 BCE–c. 483 BCE/400 BCE) and Ashoka (himself a Buddhist, although more realist), an emperor of the Maurya Dynasty who ruled from circa 268 to 232 BCE. Both versions of Indian idealism place a premium on conflict resolution and politics based on ethical-moral concerns (moralpolitik). The Ashokan tradition, however, acknowledges that the use of force is necessary in certain situations.

In that regard, despite the strong influence of the Kautilyan realpolitik tradition, modern strategic thought in India presents three founding fathers: Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru. M. Liebig [2016] maintains that “it is often said that Gandhi was the ‘idealist’ in the Buddha-Ashoka tradition, Patel a hard-core Kautilyan ‘realist’ and Nehru’s policy was a mix of Kautilyan realism and ‘idealism’ in the Ashokan tradition.” Das [2010, p. 481] agrees particularly with this brief description of Nehru’s strategic thoughts,

arguing that his views “combined two seemingly conflicting strategic traditions: [Arthashastra] political realism and Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violence.”

As uneasy as the combination of political realism and idealism might be, those perspectives have given rise to three distinct schools of thought or theoretical approaches, identified by K. Bajpai [2002] as Nehruvianism, neoliberalism, and hyperrealism, which vie for dominance in modern India and try to explain the nature of the national strategic culture. N. Goswami [2013], on the other hand, identifies only two theoretical approaches, which follow along the lines described by Bajpai: hardcore realism and Nehruvianism. Despite the significant peculiarities of each approach, however, they share a set of common assumptions and premises, which represent the core of the national strategic thinking and are examined here, while acknowledging that there may exist some other elements in common.

The first common trait is the deep-rooted conviction that India is not merely another state, but rather a distinct civilization with a rich and old history, therefore being singularly entitled to present a natural claim to greatness, leadership and cultural superiority. The main implication of this characteristic is that India sees the international system as essentially hierarchical, not anarchic or egalitarian. Its major power status should thus be naturally acknowledged rather than earned, a feature which reflects traditional social organization in India structured upon attributive indicators or standards, such as caste, family and origin [Rangarajan, 1992]. According to Jones [2006, pp. 5–7],

Indian strategic culture has a collective consciousness of the sacred origins of Indian-ness that give mythological and metaphysical significance to the subcontinent as a territorial expression [...]. India’s strategic culture sees status as an objective reality, a matter for other states to recognize and act in accordance with, not a favor for other states to confer.

Second, consistent with this notion of uniqueness is the perception that the country has a mission to bring to the world its distinct voice, whose modern political expression is its traditional neutrality or non-alignment. In the eyes of the country’s policymakers, this stance — of which the 1955 Bandung Conference, which laid the political and cultural foundations for the launching of the Non-Aligned Movement, is a remarkable example — has contributed to India’s pre-eminence over other developing nations. This is why India avoids being closely tied to countries or blocs. Actually, with the exception of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), India is not a member of any economic bloc or formal regional grouping. According to Singh [2009, p. 5], in order to understand this autonomist policy, “it must be realized that India is largely friendless in the world today. India has

friendly relations with many states but friendship with none. [...] Faced by varied threats and adversaries, India has no option but to rely on its own capabilities.”

This assessment not only reflects India’s wariness of alliances and its emphasis on strategic autonomy, but also means that, as a third feature, India takes a pragmatic approach to foreign affairs, as its strategic culture posits no permanent enemies or friends. It tends to favour a more flexible strategic stance in its external affairs, rather than adopting a doctrinally prescriptive behaviour on specific matters of war and peace, security or foreign policy [Goswami, 2013]. Driven by its aspirations to be a great power, India’s actions are taken and adopted according to the probability that they will increase its international status. Nehru used to emphasize the utilitarian nature of Indian foreign policy in the context of the Cold War, for example, by saying that “if the time comes for us to make a choice, we will without hesitation join the party that can benefit our national interests” [Xinmin, 2014, p. 159].

Likewise, as R. U. Zaman [2006, p. 242] recalls, “nonalignment did not prevent Nehru from seeking military aid from United States and Great Britain during the short Sino-Indian border war of 1962, nor did it restrain India from concluding the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971” but, as S. Ganguly [2002, p. 363] puts it, “without any strings attached.” H. V. Pant and J. M. Super [2015, p. 747] argue that India’s search for strategic autonomy has turned into a quest that “in practice has led to semi-alliances fashioned under the cover of non-alignment,” a major example being the 2014 India-U.S. Delhi Declaration of Friendship, a move followed by the “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region, which pledged to promote peace and prosperity, economic development and connectivity including freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and address poverty” [Goswami, 2016]. Likewise, in that regard, Delhi sees its BRICS affiliation as a useful instrument to obtain the international respect it thinks it deserves — by joining other important emerging powers — without having to incur the risks and costs of joining a more formal economic or political bloc. In all these examples, when it suits the national interest, strategic autonomy has given way to strategic engagement.

Fourth, power, considered the currency of international politics, is understood as a multifaceted concept based on three strong pillars. The notion of state power, therefore, necessarily includes the conjugation of economic wealth, military capabilities and political resources [Rangarajan, 1992]. States cannot prescind of any of those three dimensions, although the optimum mix and use of those capabilities is a matter of divergence among

proponents of Nehruvianism, neoliberalism, and hyperrealism. In consequence, in order to pursue the national interest, states cannot be “indifferent to the cultivation of power, their own and that of other states. States must in some measure accrue power in a competitive system” [Bajpai, 2002, p. 251]. In military terms, India is not only estimated to have an arsenal of something between 90 and 110 nuclear weapons [SIPRI, n.d.], but it is currently also the world’s fifth-largest military spender after the United States, China, Saudi Arabia and Russia. It has also been the world’s top importer of arms for nearly a decade [Sawe, 2019].

These features can be envisaged in India’s regional foreign policy, particularly its pragmatic approach. Even though the country shares borders with two potential “enemies,” for example, India tends to give priority to dialogue over the use of military power, seeking to be particularly cautious and to adopt a non-confrontational stance toward China, in a context where trade exchanges and other forms of bilateral dialogue are on the rise. Indian policymakers are aware that despite their country’s age-old history, culture and hard power capabilities, India is not yet a major global military or economic power and still lacks the strategic weight required to shape global affairs and the ability to project its influence beyond its immediate neighbourhood or decisively shape the fate of its region. For those reasons, the country is striving to further develop a more comprehensive strategy to balance Russia and China while advancing its own rise by promoting wide-ranging cooperation with other important regional actors. If, however, the use of force is deemed necessary, as last resort, the country will not refrain from using it, as its long and dense history of warfare, as well as the several skirmishes with Pakistan along the common border over the course of the last fifty years, has shown. As S. Xinmin [2014, p. 160] recalls, “Gandhi’s non-violence creed did not hamper his staunch support for the use of force in Kashmir, nor did Nehru’s non-alignment policy influence India’s acceptance of military assistance from the Soviet Union and the US in 1963 to maintain national security.”

In fact, New Delhi has actively sought to step up its economic, political and military role and presence in regional affairs and to intensify its engagement with other players in the Asia-Pacific region. It has, for example, increased its level of involvement and changed the profile of its participation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), moving from the status of a mere dialogue partner in 1995 to becoming a strategic partner in 2012. As a result of this new dynamic, not only has bilateral trade soared from \$7 billion in 2001 to \$65 billion in 2016 [ASSOCHAM, 2016] but also the bilateral agenda was broadened to include new issues, such as cooperation in political and security domains.

As its foreign policy is strongly influenced by considerations of domestic politics, particularly in border regions, and emphasizes a more regional rather than global scope of action — another common characteristic — India has sought to give more palpable contours to its Act East policy, established in 2014 to replace the decades-long Look East policy, implemented in 1991 [Swaraj, 2014]. Signalling a disposition to play a larger strategic role in the Indo-Pacific region, New Delhi has made significant advances in forging stronger strategic partnerships and in expanding military cooperation with countries in the region, particularly with Japan, Indonesia, Korea and Vietnam, among others, while becoming a reliable provider of security and military equipment. To Pant and Super [2015, p. 759], “in states such as Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines, maritime disputes with China have helped energize interest in India as a regional partner,” a situation that illustrates the growing strength of India’s regional strategy.

The last common feature — one which perhaps serves as the backbone of India’s strategic culture — is the deep-rooted belief that sovereign states are the constituents par excellence of international society, and as such, therefore, are beholden to no higher power or authority [Basrur, 2001]. In consequence, each state must find its ways and means to ensure its security, preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and pursue its interests in an essentially unstable and competitive system. This assessment does not mean that India is a revisionist country. Likewise, it is far from meaning that India rejects the current world order or refuses to engage in international institutions and norms. In fact, the country has been an advocate of the United Nations, the global trade system and the international law and principles, especially when they work in India’s favour, a stance that reinforces the pragmatist approach that India has adopted in its international relations [Das, 2010].

This mix of influences stemming from Kautilyan political tradition, Buddha’s and Ashoka’s idealism, Indian neoliberalism, Nehruvianism and hyperrealism has traditionally provided the ideational milieu within which strategic thoughts, foreign policy and security concerns are debated, plans are formulated and decisions are executed. As R. M. Basrur [2001, p. 195] points out, “while not static, there has been a considerably high degree of stability in India’s strategic culture.” Ganguly [2002, p. 363], for example, states that “for a significant portion of the Cold War the architects of India’s foreign policy professed a belief in nonalignment, Third World solidarity, state-led economic growth, and secularism.” Much in the same vein, Jones [2006, p. 3] stresses that “India’s strategic culture is not monolithic, rather is mosaic-like, but as a composite is more distinct and coherent than that of most

contemporary nation-states [...] due to its substantial continuity.” Strongly based on the geographical expression of the country and advocating the social values and particularities of the Indian state and of so-called “Indianness,” such an ideational milieu may be expected to continue serving as the framework that guides the foreign and security policies of the Indian government.

Brazilian Strategic Culture: Main Features

Different from the Indian case, Brazilian strategic culture does not have remote origins or basic characteristics found in ancient canonical texts on politico-strategic affairs. In fact, since its discovery in 1500, “geo-physical, political, economic, and socio-cultural variables have coalesced to form the basis of Brazilian Strategic Culture. Indeed [...] many serendipitous events have played a key role in defining the contours and content of Brazilian Strategic Culture” [Bitencourt, Vaz, 2009, p. 11].

With an area of more than 3 million square miles, Brazil is a continental state, occupying nearly half of South America and bordering on all the other South American states, except Ecuador and Peru. Accounting for approximately 49% of South America’s population, 60% of South America’s gross domestic product, and abounding in natural resources, Brazil, the “sleeping giant,” has long been regarded as a potential world power and has exhibited a remarkable measure of continuity in preserving its international identity. The country’s continental scale, which comes not only from its size, but also from its political, diplomatic, and economic importance, is one of the main elements of its international identity.

Despite the fact that the main elements of a Brazilian strategic culture became more discernible and consolidated when the country obtained its independence in the early 19th century (1822), and particularly after the Republic was proclaimed in 1889, one can go further into the past to find the roots of the particular Brazilian cultural and strategic self-perception, which began to develop while Brazil was nothing more than a colony of Portugal. Just like India, the ways Brazil sees the world and reacts to international events have been deeply influenced by history and geography. The analysis of these early roots is absolutely essential to understanding how the Brazilian elites’ perceptions of themselves, their state and the role of Brazil in the world came to be formed.

A nation of immigrants, Brazil presents a population which is a mix of native indigenous Amerindians, descendants of slaves captured in Africa and European families,

particularly, Portuguese, Spanish, Germans and Italians, as well as Lebanese and Japanese. Brazil, however, started as a small group of semiautonomous colonies originating from Portugal's overseas exploration, after seaman Pedro Álvares Cabral reached the Coroa Vermelha Bay, in today's state of Bahia, on 22 April 1500. Brazil's first contact with Europe through Portuguese settlers gave it a significantly distinct political, economic and social make-up when compared to Spanish America.

In contrast with the colonizing philosophy of the Spaniards, the first Portuguese settlers in Brazil were less focused on conquering, controlling or developing the new colony. Most newcomers were far more interested in establishing profitable trade relations with the Portuguese metropolis and developing subsistence agriculture along the coastal areas, particularly in the north-eastern region, "the territory that bulges east toward Africa" [Chaffee, 2012, p. 398], than they were in promoting territorial expansion. As a result, the country's vast interior remained largely unexplored during the first two centuries after discovery. However, even though most colonists established themselves along the coastal zones (a preference that continues to this day), a few brave men decided to venture into the hinterlands. Among them were Jesuit missionaries, who marched inland in search of native Indians to convert and catechize, and the bandeirantes (flag bearers), who marched inland in search of gold, silver, precious gemstones and Indians to enslave.

The relative absence of territorial expansion ambitions is a trait that can be found in the early years of Brazil's history. Another feature is that, despite official rhetoric, Brazil does not see itself as fully part of Latin America. Contrary to almost all other countries in the region, Brazil was not colonized by Spain, but by Portugal, a country whose main interests were not in the Americas but in trade with Europe, mainly with England, its most powerful ally, and Africa. In fact, the history of Portuguese America presents some remarkable contrasts with the history of colonial Spanish America. When the Portuguese fleet led by Pedro Alvarez Cabral reached the Brazilian shores for the first time, it found no Indian civilization that could be slightly compared with the more developed Aztecs or Incas. For that reason, "the Portuguese, unlike the Spanish, did not face a highly organized, settled indigenous civilization. These Indians had built no imposing cities and they had no mythic explanations for this sudden alien intrusion" [Skidmore, Smith, 1997, p. 22]. To make things worse, and unlike in most of Spanish America, some local Indians tribes practiced cannibalism, and most were semi nomadic, which in practical terms meant that the

colonization process would have to follow a gradual strategy, rather than the immediate conquest and occupation policy adopted by the Spaniards.

Most importantly, as there were no apparent signs of precious metals, particularly gold and silver, “and consequently no easy path to fabulous wealth” [Skidmore, Smith, 1997, p. 22], as opposed to most of Spanish America, agriculture was the main economic activity in the new Portuguese colony, especially the cultivation of sugar cane. The extension of the territory, the hostility of the natives and the apparent scarcity of mineral resources led the Portuguese crown to initially exert a much looser control over Brazil than the Spanish monarchy did in its overseas dominions. This situation only started to change when Portuguese and Dutch settlers managed to develop a lucrative sugar industry in the north-eastern region of the country in the early 17th century. By 1650, Brazil had already become the world’s main producer of sugar cane, produced almost in its entirety by African slaves brought into Brazil by Portuguese slave traffickers.

In this historical context, the colonial ties with the Portuguese metropolis and the huge slave trade with Africa were the two most important factors which contributed to the formation of colonial Brazil during the first centuries and, indeed, up to the early 19th century. These facts imply that since the 16th century, when Brazil consisted of nothing more than a few Portuguese military outposts and commercial enclaves on its north-eastern coast, Brazil has had an Atlantic and eastward-looking orientation, which means that the country has historically turned its back to its Spanish neighbours and has looked to Europe for most of its cultural, legal, economic, political and scientific models. “Clinging to the coast like crabs,” as once noted the Franciscan Frei Vicente do Salvador, the first historian of Brazil, in 1627 [Philippou, 2006, p. 184], the scarce local population, mostly scattered along the Atlantic coast and physically separated from Spanish America by the Andes and vast extensions of the Amazon rainforest, thrived in a state of almost complete isolation from the rest of the so-called New World.

During most of its first three centuries, Brazil’s trade relations with its regional neighbours varied between non-existent and inexpressive. Indeed, this lack of economic engagement favoured the emergence of a situation in which the only sustained contact with Spanish America during that time was in the form of border disputes, facts that reinforced the sentiments of cultural insularity and uniqueness which shaped the Brazilian identity. In his much acclaimed book *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves) about the

formation of Brazilian society, published originally in 1933, Gilberto Freyre, one of the most important Brazilian scholars, explains that among the main characteristics of Brazilian society are hospitality and an innate aversion to conflicts of any nature, which are a “manifestation of the so-called gregarious instinct intensified by isolation” [1963, p. 87].

The idea behind these arguments is that the myth of a common Latin American identity has never really penetrated the general public in Brazil and never found any significant resonance in the Brazilian cultural ethos and society. Actually, Brazilians tend not to see themselves as Latin Americans, except when it is economically or politically convenient. The Portuguese language is not the only variable that separates Brazil from its Spanish-speaking neighbours. Culture, history, tradition and interests are also important distinguishing features which help to explain why Brazilians “have had only a vague awareness and interest in what goes on in the rest of Latin America until very recently” [Eakin, 2009, p. 4]. L. Bitencourt and A. Vaz [2009, pp. 13–5] share these ideas and observe that

In general, it is quite extraordinary to contemplate the fact that historically, Brazil has for the most part been able to avoid the rampant violence that has plagued its neighbors, and that it has been able to expand its territory non-violently despite the formal limits placed upon it from external sources of authority...Brazil emerged as a nation quite different from its continental neighbors, and can hardly fit into the strategic and cultural framework of Latin America as a whole...Brazilians do not consider themselves ‘Latin American,’ and take all possible opportunities to underscore their cultural, historical, and language differences *vis-à-vis* the ‘Hispanic’ countries in the region.

The findings of a recent comparative public opinion survey called *The Americas and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, coordinated by the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE-Mexico) [2015], support this idea. The research, whose main objective is to analyze how Latin Americans perceive foreign policy issues across the region and also through time, found that the average Brazilian does not perceive himself/herself as part of Latin America or South America. When asked about their perception regarding national or regional identity, 79% of the respondents defined themselves as “Brazilians,” 13% as “citizens of the world,” 4% as “Latin Americans,” and only 1% as “South Americans.” In a sharp contrast, the average of respondents who defined themselves as “Latin Americans” in six other countries of the region (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru) was 43%.

Size, insularity and geographic location have not only shaped Brazil's relationship with the major powers and its regional neighbours but have also been fundamental to forging the country's strategic culture. In spite of its continental dimensions, Brazil has always been a "coastal civilization," as even today nearly 80% of the Brazilian population lives within two hundred miles of the Atlantic. The existence of a vast and largely empty interior between Brazil and its neighbouring countries, most of it in jungle areas of difficult access, contributed to the low number of border disputes recorded in Brazilian history, which "allowed Brazil's military to develop without serious concern for foreign enemies...rather than fear its neighbors, the Brazilian elites (especially Itamaraty and the military) have worried about the machinations of the Great Powers" [Eakin, 2009, p. 6].

As a matter of fact, over the course of its more than 500-year history, Brazil has not had any serious military conflict with its neighbours, with the exception of the Cisplatine War (1825–28), an armed conflict between the Empire of Brazil and what is now Uruguay, and the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–70), which opposed Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay against Paraguay. The absence of credible foreign threats to the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty had two direct implications. First, the predominance of internal over external challenges led the elites and the military to focus on nation-building, economic growth and internal security issues. In fact, economic development has always been considered a national security objective and a defining feature of Brazilian strategic culture. This might be the reason why the country's military organizations, in a historical perspective, have not been considered

an integral part of the country's foreign policy toolbox, focusing instead on territorial deterrence and an extensive array of internal tasks ranging from the provision of basic infrastructure in rural areas to delivery of government programmes (such as vaccinations) to the forceful pacification of slums (favelas) in urban areas in preparation for upcoming megaevents [Kenkel, 2013, p. 110].

Second, it inculcated in the diplomatic corps and in the military the idea of a preferential option for negotiated solutions. K. Kenkel [2013, p. 109] agrees with this line of reasoning and states that

in geostrategic terms, much of Brazil's land border spans practically indefensible jungle territory, and the bulk of the country's vast resources lie in the sparsely settled and controlled interior while the great majority of the population reside along the coastline. This unique situation of geostrategic exposure forms the foundational dilemma of what has been recognized as a distinct Brazilian tradition in geopolitical thought.

The emergence of a strong nationalism and a remarkable cultural homogeneity have also shaped how Brazilians feel and perceive themselves. These ideas echo Freyre's masterwork (1963), in which the Brazilian scholar depicted the portrait of a country devoid of ethnic and linguistic fractures, in which centuries of racial, social and cultural mixture produced a unique melting pot, which arguably made Brazilian people superior to any other on earth. That powerful nationalism, coupled with self-aggrandizing perceptions of the self, is at the core of Brazilian identity and the country's long-standing quest for greatness — features that are essential elements of the Brazilian strategic culture. In that sense, General Carlos Meira Mattos, considered one of main interpreters of Brazilian geopolitical thought, once stated that “we possess all the conditions that enable us to aspire to a place among the world's great powers” [Brands, 2010, p. 6]. Likewise, Franko [2014, p. 127] characterizes Brazil as “a nation whose strategy has been grounded by nationalism in the service of sovereignty.” While Bitencourt and Vaz [2009, pp. 13–4] believe that Brazil was “able to experience a sense of geographic and cultural unity as far as identification with an ethnically and racially diverse populace with the grander notion of a unified Brazil cultural,” which certainly had a formative impact on the development of the Brazilian strategic culture, M. Eakin [2009, pp. 11–2] argues that

five centuries of cultural and racial mixing have produced...[a country with] an impressive internal homogeneity that provides it with an ability to act globally without the linguistic, ethnic, sectarian, and regional divides that so fragment other large nations...This mixing has produced a people with a remarkable set of shared symbols, rituals, and beliefs — who share a profound unity.

The Brazilian people, somehow, have developed a self-perception that they are naturally endowed with the ability to resolve conflicts in a negotiated way. The fact is that, over time, Brazil has unequivocally expressed its reliance on and preference for negotiated solutions for conflicts. Even the country's independence from Portugal in 1822, was more of a negotiated arrangement than a prolonged and violent process. Compared with its Spanish-speaking neighbours, Brazil's independence process was relatively peaceful and uneventful, allowing the country enter statehood with considerably less strife and bloodshed, despite some violent reactions in what are now the states of Pernambuco and Bahia. On 29 August 1825, through the medium of a treaty brokered by the United Kingdom, Portugal acknowledged the independence of Brazil, putting an end to Brazil's fear of an impending massive Portuguese attack [Degaut, 2015].

A lesser-known historic fact — and one that clearly reveals the Brazilian preference for negotiated solutions — is that, in exchange for Brazil's recognition, then-Emperor Pedro agreed to settle Portugal's debts with Britain. Secret clauses of the 1825 treaty determined that Brazil would assume responsibility for paying about 1.4 million pounds sterling of Portugal's debt to Britain and would give another 600,000 pounds sterling to Dom João VI, King of Portugal, supposedly as an indemnity for the loss of the former colony and as personal reparation.

This newly won independence was unusual among the anticolonial movements in the region and helped to place Brazil in a *sui generis* position in the whole context of the Americas, launching the country on a trajectory different from the rest of Latin America, underscoring even more its uniqueness and emphasizing its differences *vis-à-vis* its regional neighbours. Throughout much of the 19th century, Brazil enjoyed a stable monarchy, envied by neighbouring countries. It remained the only monarchy in a republican continent, or, as C. Lafer [2004, p. 35] would say, “an empire among republics,” and “a great Portuguese-speaking territorial mass that remained united while the Hispanic world fragmented [...]. That is why, in the nineteenth century, in view of our position in South America, to be Brazilian meant not to be Hispanic” [Lafer, 2000, p. 212].

With the end of the monarchical regime and the advent of the Republic in 1889, the main traits of the Brazilian strategic culture became even more discernible. In 1902, José Maria da Silva Paranhos Jr., more commonly known as Baron of Rio Branco, was appointed minister of foreign affairs, retaining office until his death in 1912. Rio Branco, considered “the patron of Brazilian diplomacy,” adroitly managed to combine all the elements of the Brazilian strategic culture to pursue his geopolitical view of a singular and powerful, yet peaceful Brazil, reinforcing the belief about a land destined to greatness, a vision of grandiosity which has inspired generation after generation of diplomats, military officers and policymakers.

Rio Branco was fundamental for the construction of the international identity of Brazil, as his vision shaped both the boundaries of the country and the traditions of Brazilian foreign relations. His most important legacy was his successful endeavour to negotiate territorial disputes between Brazil and some of its neighbours, including Argentina and Bolivia, and consolidate the borders of modern Brazil in a peaceful manner. Rio Branco was, however, heir to a tradition of negotiation, which has developed a sound foreign policy

repertoire built upon principles such as pacifism, multilateralism and realism, which has assumed a prominent role in the development of the national strategic culture.

Diplomacy literally shaped Brazilian borders. G. Casarões [2014, p. 88] argues that “Brazil [...] is a country that has been almost entirely forged by diplomacy — to the extent that our rejection of the use of force has become part of our national identity.” Modern Brazil indeed is a result of a series of diplomatic initiatives and agreements: the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), which divided the newly discovered lands outside Europe between Portugal and Spain; the Treaty of Madrid (1750), also between Portugal and Spain, which put an end to border disputes between the two empires in South America, and ceded much of what is today’s southern Brazil to the Portuguese; the secret independence treaties between Brazil and Portugal; and the border treaties negotiated by Rio Branco.

Casarões [2014, p. 89] also observes that diplomacy “has always been the ticket to Brazil’s international recognition.” As Brazil has lacked the economic and military capabilities that would provide the basis for a more significant role in international affairs and that could compel other countries to accept its emergence, Brazil has relied heavily on the skills developed by its diplomatic service to maximize its autonomy in the international system, always placing a premium on the norms of sovereignty, non-intervention, peaceful resolution of disputes and cooperation. This situation not only led the country to largely neglect its military capabilities and needs but also led some to claim that if Brazil is to one day be able to have a significant systematic impact on the global order, “it will have to do so not through the inexorable accumulation of geopolitical weight, but through the resourcefulness of its strategy and diplomacy” [Brands, 2010, p. 3].

As seen, the main characteristics of the Brazilian national character — and of the country’s strategic culture, among which one can find preference for peaceful means of conflict resolution and for instruments of soft power over hard power, a belief in predestined greatness and to natural leadership in the Latin American space, singularity in Latin America due to Portuguese colonization and Portuguese language, and pragmatism in its international relations — were developed during the formative years of the state. The way Brazil assesses the international scenario to formulate its security and foreign policies therefore reflects its strategic culture. Relatively deprived of hard power capabilities, Brazil has consistently advocated the use of ideational resources as a strategy to promote changes in the international

scenario to shape an international environment more conducive to the achievement of the state's interests.

Conclusion

There is a robust association between Brazil's and India's respective strategic cultures — which are intimately tied to their traditions, history and geography — and those countries' strategic calculations and choices. In both cases, the politico-diplomatic framework produced by their strategic cultures has, to some extent, guided the direction and range of their international choices and shaped their security and foreign policies, concerns, behaviours and preferences. Considering that such an approach also emphasizes the culture of strategic decision-making, it has formed the ideational milieu within which diplomacy has traditionally operated, ideas debated, lines of action devised, and decisions implemented.

As a mechanism that tends to reflect the rationale behind the preference for specific courses of action or for the adoption of specific policies to address a given issue, this conceptual perspective can offer important avenues into understanding national detectable motivations, what informs the thinking and reasoning of a country's policymakers, and the processes through which these understandings engender decisions regarding the pursuit of foreign policy and national security objectives.

Both countries, due to their history, traditions, geographic circumstances and social organization have distinct preferences, dispositions and practices in their foreign and security policy, which have led them to pursue different paths and approaches to reach their objectives despite some basic common traits, as previously seen. These two states share a belief that they are predestined to greatness, to play a bigger role in their regional contexts and to become major stakeholders in global affairs. They both advocate the reform of the global governance system. They both still exhibit a rather ambiguous standard of relationship with the world's still-sole superpower, the United States, while trying to find a *modus vivendi* with China.

Both Brazil and India have made noteworthy strides in the economic, political and, to some extent, even military realms in recent years. They both have sought to consolidate their presence in a mounting number of global decision-making institutions. Their strengths, capabilities and international standing have significantly improved, and their external behaviour, negotiating styles and strategies, position in multilateral forums, and stance on

international issues display a remarkable continuity through time, even though the international system has undergone significant changes in its structure and functioning. Although such patterns can be indicative of consistency in their international relations, it can, coupled with their perceptions of themselves and their roles and places in the world, also be anachronistic in some cases and reveal an inability to adapt to a changing environment. This seems to be particularly true in the Brazilian case, which tends to present a higher disposition for risk-avoidance than India, a country also characterized by a deep attachment to its historical traditions. Brazil's traditional non-confrontational politics might reflect — and be a consequence of — the relative weakness of its military power. Brazil's preference for multilateralism and peaceful resolutions of controversies represents a staple of its foreign policy principles, while India's preference for power politics includes the understanding and acceptance of the legitimacy of the use of power, and even recourse to war, to pursue foreign policy objectives.

It must be noted, however, that the strategic culture approach is about discerning tendencies rather than identifying determinants of behaviours or preferences. The focus of this theoretical approach has traditionally been on continuity or semi-permanence in strategic culture, as foreign policy strategies and behaviours are mediated through a set of core ideas, beliefs and doctrines that the country's decision-makers use to justify preferences and actions. Although those ideas, beliefs and doctrines may — and should — undergo changes throughout the years, therefore leading to changes in a country's intentions, those changes tend to evolve very slowly, making those variables semi-permanent features of the national character and identity. To a large extent, it is this relative continuity that allows a country to articulate a minimally coherent strategy which tends to reflect its worldviews, as anachronistic as it might be. It enables a country to decide what kind of world it wishes to build and which international system is more conducive to its interests, to define and implement its foreign policy priorities, and to identify and allocate all instruments of power available to pursue its international objectives in an integrated manner.

This article has sought to show that the study of strategic culture can provide an important analytical lens through which to better understand the continuities underlying Brazil's and India's international actions and the possible motivations behind them. While the strategic culture approach is not intended to produce a predictive model of behaviour, it can suggest which lines of action and outcomes tend to be more likely than others in a given circumstance and provide a consistent explanation as to why, since it can provide tools that

allow researchers and analysts to understand and interpret state diplomatic and military action in a particular historical context. It is not, however, an imperative dogma to be followed, nor a narrow framework through which look into the past and have the future revealed, but rather a useful tool to comprehend and assess the politico-cultural environment in which policymakers operate and determine possible means and ends to attain foreign policy and security objectives, as well as the forces that somehow influence, shape, condition and define a country's political action, particularly when supplementing more traditional schools of international relations theory.

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