

THE BRAZILIAN POSITION IN THE UNITED NATIONS ON THE SITUATION IN SYRIA (2011): A PERSPECTIVE FROM BRAZIL'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER DILMA ROUSSEFF

A POSIÇÃO DO BRASIL NAS NAÇÕES UNIDAS SOBRE A SITUAÇÃO NA SÍRIA (2011): UMA PERSPECTIVA DA POLÍTICA EXTERNA BRASILEIRA SOB DILMA ROUSSEFF

Rafaela Elmir Fioreze¹

RESUMO

O presente artigo propõe-se a analisar a posição brasileira na Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU) nas discussões sobre a situação na Síria em 2011 (ano em que o conflito sírio eclodiu e em que o Brasil ocupava um assento não-permanente no Conselho de Segurança) à luz da política externa do governo Dilma Rousseff. Almejando entender posicionamentos que, inicialmente, podem parecer incoerentes, busca-se responder a seguinte pergunta: Como os votos do Brasil na ONU sobre a situação síria se relacionam com a política externa de Dilma Rousseff? Para isso, analisam-se, além das principais características da Guerra Civil Síria, as linhas gerais da política externa de Rousseff e, posteriormente, os votos brasileiros nas Nações Unidas sobre a questão síria ao longo de 2011, procurando-se, por fim, demonstrar como estes dois eixos se conectam.

Palavras-chave: Política Externa Brasileira; Governo Dilma Rousseff; Nações Unidas; Situação na Síria.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the Brazilian position in the United Nations (UN) in the discussions on the situation in Syria in 2011 (year in which the Syrian conflict erupted, and Brazil occupied a non-permanent seat on the Security Council) in light of Dilma Rousseff's foreign policy. Looking forward to understanding positions that may initially seem incoherent, we seek to answer the following question: How do Brazil's votes at the UN on the Syrian situation relate to Rousseff's foreign policy? In order to do so, we analyze, besides the core characteristics of the Syrian Civil War, the main guidelines of Dilma Rousseff government's foreign policy, and then Brazil's votes in the UN concerning Syria throughout 2011, finally attempting to demonstrate how these two axes connect.

Keywords: Brazilian Foreign Policy; Dilma Rousseff Government; United Nations; Situation in Syria.

INTRODUCTION

In October 2010, by the end of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's second mandate, Brazil elected, for the first time in its entire history, a woman as its president. Having conquered 56.05% of the votes, against José Serra's – Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB)'s candidate – 43.95%, Dilma Vana Rousseff became the first woman to ascend to the highest position in Brazil's political system (G1, 2010). While this event *per se* represented a significant change in the country's political scene, as Lula's "heir" and as the Workers' Party (PT) official candidate,

¹ Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul - UFRGS (rafaelafioreze@gmail.com)

Rousseff was in charge of ensuring the continuity of the former administration policies, among which was the very prestigious – but at the same time controversial² – hitherto prevailing foreign policy (ALBANUS 2015; SARAIVA 2014).

Even though Dilma Rousseff's foreign policy agenda did, in general terms, follow the same guidelines and had the same objectives of its predecessor's one, the domestic and international background against which the new presidency had to operate was very different from the one that existed throughout the eight years of Lula's government. In economic terms, the end of the *commodities' boom* added to the impacts of the 2008 financial crisis, which affected Brazil belatedly, resulting, *inter alia*, in a decline in the country's economic growth (THE WORLD BANK, 2018). In the international political arena, the world witnessed the outbreak of several uprisings that eventually evolved into major socio-political movements advocating the end of long-lasting and allegedly authoritarian regimes in some of most important countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This phenomenon, which came to be known as the Arab Spring, started in Tunisia and quickly spread across the region, reaching countries such as Libya, Egypt and Syria (HAZBUN, 2015).

At this very delicate moment in the world's history, Brazil had already achieved a significant degree of projection in the international scenario, partly due to President Lula's and Foreign Minister Celso Amorim's "active and haughty" foreign policy. Accordingly, throughout Lula's years in the presidency, his administration sought to pursue ambitious goals internationally, such as the diversification of Brazil's relations abroad and a greater participation in multilateral institutions (HIRST; LIMA; PINHEIRO, 2010; VISENTINI 2012). As a result, in 2010, Brazil started its biennium as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – probably the world's most important and prestigious forum for discussing international security-related issues (GARCEZ, 2009). This means that, while the Syrian Civil War escalated and turned into an issue of major discussion among the international community, Brazil played a significant role in international bodies and was thus able to participate in decisions regarding this event, even in the most exclusive *fora*, such as the UNSC.

² Several Brazilian diplomats (such as Paulo Roberto de Almeida, Rubens Ricúpero, Celso Lafer and Luiz Felipe Lampreia) have, to a greater or lesser extent, adopted a critical position regarding Brazil's foreign policy under Lula da Silva, claiming, for instance that, during his government, the country's external actions and decisions were based on the Worker's Party political perspective (JAKOBSEN, 2013).

Bearing all of this in mind, the present research paper aims at analyzing the Brazilian votes in the United Nations regarding the situation in Syria in 2011 – year in which the conflict erupted and during which Brazil occupied a non-permanent seat at the organization’s Security Council. As it will be later explored, given that Brazil has voted differently and with varied coalitions in this same subject, the country’s stances and votes might seem inconsistent and even controversial at a first sight; when assessed in light of Dilma Rousseff’s main guidelines and principles of foreign policy, nonetheless, they may be better understood. Therefore, this research paper seeks to answer the following question: how do Brazil’s votes in the UN concerning the situation in Syria relate to the Brazilian foreign policy under Dilma Rousseff?

In order to accomplish this objective, the present research paper will rely on a qualitative analysis, based both on primary and secondary bibliography. In this sense, a documental analysis of the selected UN Resolutions is supplemented by previous studies of some Brazilian Foreign Policy authors. The paper will first make a review on the Syrian Civil War, briefly providing a background of the conflict. Following that, a broad overview of Rousseff government’s foreign policy is provided, highlighting its main ideas and fields of action, as well as attempting to understand in which aspects it gives – or it does not give – continuity to Lula’s measures in foreign affairs. In a third stage, we shall analyze the various UN bodies’ resolutions on the Syrian situation that have been put to vote in 2011 and how Brazil positioned itself in each of them. Finally, in the concluding section, we will try to better understand Brazil’s stance on this subject, considering its votes in the aforementioned resolutions within the framework of its foreign policy’s main principles.

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Over the last nine years, the international community has been witnessing the development of one of the most remarkable crises of our century: the so-called Syrian Civil War. What started as a movement against Bashar al-Assad’s regime quickly escalated and turned into an armed conflict, as the government’s forces responded to the popular uprisings with great brutality (HAZBUN, 2015). From that moment on, general discontent began to grow, and the government was soon faced with largely structured opposition groups, organized mainly under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and backed by foreign powers (MONIZ BANDEIRA, 2013).

Accordingly, as the conflict unfolded and tensions escalated, a growing number of regional and extra regional actors found themselves involved in the Syrian war: on the one hand, supporting the rebel groups both financially and logistically, there are several Gulf monarchies – among which one shall highlight Saudi Arabia –, Turkey and the United States; on the other hand, backing the Assad government, there are Iran, Russia and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah³ (TERRILL 2011). The scenario became even more complicated by 2013, as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a jihadist group aspiring to form a caliphate, started to seize parts of the Syrian territory. The group's fast expansion alarmed the international community and, as a result, attempts to undermine ISIL's positions abounded – at the same time as thousands of airstrikes were carried out by a U.S.-led coalition, the Islamic State also faced the opposition of Turkish troops and the Kurds⁴ on the ground (CFR, 2020)

While the conflict appears to be currently stabilized – with Assad having reconquered the control of some strategic areas, partly due to Russian direct intervention –, there are no signs of an end to the Syrian Civil War in the horizon. Ongoing violence in Syria has taken its toll on the population, resulting in astonishing numbers of civilian deceases as well as a growing concern regarding the humanitarian conditions in the country. In addition, the conflict's continuity has increased the number of internally displaced persons, also creating a dense refugee flow to neighboring countries. To the present moment, no agreements on the crisis have been reached, and uncertainty about the situation in Syria prevails (CFR, 2020).

BRAZIL'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER DILMA ROUSSEFF

In spite of having arguably been a turning point in Brazil's political history, the election of Dilma Rousseff did not bring about major changes in the country's foreign policy in relation to the former government. Rather, the new administration's intentions were to “guide Brazil's external action by preserving the accomplishments of recent years and by building on the solid

³ It is worth mentioning that the Syrian Civil War is often understood as a *proxy* war (that is, a war fought by third parties through the sponsorship of different groups) between Saudi Arabia and Iran. For years, but particularly since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the two countries have been sustaining rival positions in the Middle East (TERRILL, 2011).

⁴ The Kurds are a traditional Middle Eastern ethnic group that inhabit parts of the territories of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq – region that they claim to be their own state, the Kurdistan. The Kurdish people has played a remarkable role in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria, figuring, in this regard, as an important ally of the U.S. (CFR, 2020).

foundation of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's government's achievements" (PATRIOTA 2011b: 37). Thus, besides continuing to support traditional values and principles of the Brazilian foreign policy – among which one can emphasize the self-determination of peoples, non-intervention, and the respect of each country's sovereignty – Rousseff's external actions were also shaped by some strategies inherited from its predecessor (and, in some cases, even from Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government), such as an active participation in multilateral organizations, a focus on the relations with the so-called Global South and, more specifically, with South America, and a revisionist approach to international institutions (CERVO; LESSA, 2014; SARAIVA, 2014).

In this sense, in the bilateral sphere, Brazil kept on looking forward to further diversifying its partnerships abroad, especially in Africa and Asia. Although these numbers may be regarded as not very expressive when compared to those of president Lula's mandates, during Rousseff's first three years of government, 10 Brazilian diplomatic posts were opened, out of which 8 were embassies (CORNETET, 2014). More than that, the new government also sought to enhance and deepen already existing relations with countries of strategic importance to Brazil, with a special focus on those of the African continent. A very remarkable instrument used to accomplish this goal was the execution of technical cooperation projects, carried out by the Brazilian Agency of Cooperation (ABC). During Dilma Rousseff's first mandate (2011-2014), for instance, a total of 157 technical cooperation projects for Africa began to be developed, either bilaterally, triangularly or multilaterally (COSTA, 2015). It is also worth mentioning that many of these projects had a special focus on health and education issues (ALBANUS, 2015).

The regional level, for its turn, remained, at least in rhetoric, being a priority to Dilma Rousseff's foreign policy. Ever since the beginning of her mandate, the president stressed the importance of the South American subcontinent, regarding its countries as "valuable political and economic partners of Brazil" and acknowledging that "the destinies of each one of the countries and ours are indelibly connected" (ROUSSEFF, 2011b: 58). In practice, however, some scholars (CERVO; LESSA 2014; LOPES, 2013) consider the regionalist endeavor under Brazilian leadership to have lost strength during Rousseff's administration, which seems to have given special attention to the global arena and relegated the regional environment to a second level – situation that, to a greater or lesser extent, was linked to the increasing costs of fostering and sustaining regional integration. Despite such retraction, nevertheless, the

participation in regional mechanisms continued to be a major part of Brazil's strategy of projection; as such, the country remained one of the most important players and promoters – if not the most important one – of the various regional fora, such as the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) and, in Latin American terms, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) (LEÃO, 2016; MIRANDA; RIBEIRO, 2015).

Lastly, the multilateral arena constituted one of the main environments in which Brazil's participation represented a means not only to enhance its projection worldwide, but also to advance its own interests and claims. Namely, Brazil's position in these institutions was one of questioning the prevailing status quo and, therefore, of calling for equality between nations and greater space of participation for the developing countries (ALBANUS, 2015). In this sense, albeit with less enthusiasm than its predecessor, Dilma Rousseff's foreign policy continued to advocate a reform of the UNSC⁵, viewed as obsolete and inappropriate to solve the then emerging issues (CERVO; LESSA, 2014). Also important in this regard was Brazil's participation in the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) Dialogue Forum and in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), groups that, being composed by increasingly important emerging powers, attempted to question and provide an alternative for the hegemonic structures. As noted by Albanus (2015), this latter coalition became particularly cohesive during Rousseff's administration.

Even though Dilma Rousseff has indeed followed some of the ideas and given continuity to the main axes of action of Lula's foreign policy, one cannot merely say that the former is a reproduction of the latter. Accordingly, as stressed by Rousseff's first Minister of Foreign Relations, Antônio Patriota (2011a: 46), "to continue is not to repeat". In other words, despite the existence of many lines of continuity, the new president would bring her own perspectives and impressions to the execution of foreign policy. In this regard, one may notice that the foreign policy carried out during Dilma Rousseff's administration differentiated itself from the one developed under Lula da Silva in two main aspects: first, in terms of execution, in what concerns the presidential diplomacy; and, second, in terms of formulation, in what concerns the defense of human rights (CORNETET, 2014).

⁵ In this regard, it is worth mentioning that, alongside Germany, India and Japan, Brazil is part of the so-called G-4, a group of countries that advocates a reform of the UNSC. With such, each of these states seeks to become a permanent member of the Council (SILVA, 2015).

Defined by Danese (1999: 51) as “the personal management of foreign policy matters, other than routine or ex-officio duties, by the President or, in case of a parliamentary system the Head of State and/or Head of Government”, the so-called presidential diplomacy was a very remarkable feature of Lula’s government. The then president, who granted a singular dedication to foreign affairs, was not rarely involved in issues usually handled with by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The same is not true for Dilma Rousseff, nonetheless. During her time in the presidency, Rousseff adopted a much more reserved international profile and left great part of foreign policy formulation to Itamaraty’s bureaucracy. For matters of illustration, such difference between the two presidents can be better understood when considering the number of international presidential trips (a useful indicator for measuring the extent of the presidential diplomacy): whilst Lula made 81 international trips in the first three years of his first mandate and 124 international trips in the first three years of his second mandate, Dilma Rousseff made 56 international trips in the same period of her own government (CORNETET, 2014).

The second aspect of distinction between Lula’s and Rousseff’s foreign policy is the defense of human rights. Partly due to Dilma Rousseff’s personal background, as a victim of torture during Brazil’s military regime, the president has, since the beginning of her government, adopted a more assertive approach towards the respect for human rights and the condemnation of those who violate it (ALBANUS, 2015). If during the Lula years some strategic interests might have prevailed over concerns with human rights’ violations, with Dilma, Brazil began to show a growing “willingness to criticize individual countries for their human rights records” (ENGSTROM, 2012: 11). A very remarkable initiative concerning Rousseff’s foreign policy engagement with human rights’ issues was the proposition of the *Responsibility while Protecting* (RwP) concept, following NATO’s – apparently politically motivated – invasion of Libya under the pretext of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (FERREYRA, 2019). With this, Brazil aimed at preventing the misuse of the R2P principle “for purposes other than protecting civilians, such as regime change” (UNITED NATIONS, 2011a: 3), also showing its non-indifference in situations of grave human rights violations.

To varying degrees and in different situations, all of the abovementioned principles and ideas have underpinned the formulation, as well as the execution, of Brazilian foreign policy during the government of Dilma Rousseff. While the new administration gave, to a large extent,

continuity to the foreign policy carried out during Lula da Silva's government, Rousseff has also been keen to introduce a few new features in this domain. Having properly understood these guidelines, it is possible to move forward and analyze Brazil's position in the UN regarding the conflict in Syria.

BRAZIL'S VOTES IN THE UNITED NATIONS CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN SYRIA (2011)

Fearing that the situation in Syria could escalate and that the country could eventually become a "new Libya", Brazil has, since the beginning of the conflict, shown its preoccupation and attempted to take part in initiatives to mitigate the ongoing violence in the Middle Eastern state. Based on the traditional principles of people's self-determination, non-intervention and peaceful settlement of disputes, Brazil adopted a position of encouraging dialogue between the belligerent parties, having even sent to the Syrian capital, alongside its IBSA partners, a delegation to discuss ways of reducing the violence and future political perspectives for the country (RIEDIGER 2013). In spite of the mission's failure, the situation in Syria remained being an important topic in Rousseff's foreign policy agenda and, as such, the Brazilian president, in her speech at the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2011, urged

All of the nations here gathered to find a legitimate and effective way of aiding the societies that claim for reform, without depriving their citizens of the right to conduct the procedure. We vehemently repudiate the brutal repressions that victimize civilian populations. We are convinced that, for the international community, the use of force must always be the last resort (ROUSSEFF, 2011a: online).

During 2011, year in which the Syrian Civil War began, and in which Brazil occupied a non-permanent seat at the UNSC, four resolutions – of three different committees – regarding the situation in Syria were put to vote within the scope of the UN system. Approved by the end of April 2011 in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the first of these resolutions – namely, A/HRC/RES/S-16/1 – condemned the employment of methods of lethal violence against peaceful protesters, also calling for a ceasing of all human rights violations, the protection of the Syrian population and the respect of fundamental freedoms. Moreover, the resolution urged the Office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights to dispatch a mission to Syria with the objective of investigating the alleged human rights violations (UNITED NATIONS, 2011b). Later, in the same year, another resolution concerning the

situation of human rights in Syria was drafted. Resolution A/HRC/RES/S-17/1, strongly condemning the ongoing “grave and systematic human rights violations by the Syrian authorities, such as arbitrary executions, excessive use of force and the killing and persecution of protesters and human rights defenders”, was also approved within UNHRC’s framework (UNITED NATIONS, 2011c: 1). In both cases, Brazil – in accordance with an assertive defense of human rights put forward by president Rousseff – voted favorably to the adoption of the proposed resolutions (RIEDIGER, 2013; UNITED NATIONS, 2011b).

A few months after the UNHRC members voted on resolution A/HRC/RES/S-17/1, the issue of human rights’ violation in Syria also began to be discussed in the UNGA. Praising the efforts made that far by the Human Rights Committee, Resolution A/RES/66/176, adopted in December 19, during the General Assembly’s 89th plenary meeting, further condemned the human rights situation in the Middle Eastern country and called upon Syrian authorities to abide by their obligations under international human rights law. Following the position adopted in both of the UNHRC resolutions, Brazil found itself among the group of countries whose votes were in favor of the newly produced document (UNITED NATIONS, 2012).

The most controversial – and whose votes have had the greatest international repercussion – draft resolution, however, was the one put to vote in the UNSC in October 4th. Presenting a more coercive character than its variants adopted in other UN bodies, draft resolution S/2011/612, besides condemning the human rights situation in Syria, also opened up space for the imposition of sanctions against the country. Accordingly, it called upon all states to monitor and restrain “the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer to Syria of arms and related materiel of all types, as well as technical training, financial resources or services, advice, or other services or assistance related to such arms and related materiel”, also stressing that, in case Syria did not properly implement the resolution, the Security Council could consider other options, “including measures under Article 41⁶ of the Charter of the United Nations” (UNITED NATIONS, 2011d: 2).

⁶ According to the Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council may, if it considers necessary in order to make its decisions prevail, apply measures such as the cut of a country’s communication means, as well as the interruption of economic and diplomatic relations with a determinate country (UNITED NATIONS, 1945).

In spite of having achieved the nine necessary favorable votes, the draft resolution was not approved because of China and Russia, which vetoed⁷ the document's approval on the basis that it could hurt the principles of non-interference in domestic affairs and that using an ultimatum of sanctions was not an adequate conduct in a peaceful settlement, respectively (UNITED NATIONS, 2011e). Brazil, for its turn, abstained from voting, along with India, Lebanon and South Africa. When explaining the country's decision to abstain, Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti clarified that Brazil wished that further efforts towards an agreement between the council's members had been made before the draft resolution was put to vote. As stressed by the Ambassador, "due to Syria's centrality to regional stability, it is even more imperative that this Council acts cautiously and preferably with a single voice" (VIOTTI, 2011: 114). In contrast to what happened in the other aforementioned votes, notwithstanding, the stance adopted by Brazil regarding draft resolution S/2011/612 resonated in an unprecedented way in the international community, to such an extent that the country has been called an accomplice of the Assad government (CASARÕES, 2012).

FINAL REMARKS

In light of the previous sections, which have sought to provide a broad overview on Dilma Rousseff's foreign policy and an analysis of Brazil's votes in the UN regarding the situation in Syria, some final conclusions can be drawn about the Brazilian position on the Syrian Civil War in this multilateral organism in relation to main principles guiding its foreign affairs. As it could be observed, by the time the conflict in Syria broke out, Brazil had already achieved a robust international profile and, therefore, represented an important player in most international organizations, meaning that it could participate in the discussions and decisions on the matter, even in the most sensitive bodies, as the UNSC – where Brazil occupied a non-permanent seat during the years of 2010 and 2011.

When analyzed in isolation, the Brazilian votes in the different UN organisms in 2011 may lead one to initially see the country's position as contradictory, or at least volatile. Accordingly, whereas in three different situations (two times in the Human Rights Council and once in the General Assembly) the country has been assertive in condemning the Syrian government for its

⁷ The permanent members of the UNSC (China, France, Russia, United States and United Kingdom) have the so-called veto power, which allows them to veto any substantive resolution (SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT, 2019).

human rights violations, in another case (in the Security Council), it has been more hesitant, thus choosing to abstain from voting in the proposed draft resolution. More than that, this also implies that, when voting favorably to the resolutions, Brazil ended up aligning itself with countries that have openly and more emphatically opposed to Bashar al-Assad's regime, such as the United States, Great Britain and France; on the other hand, when abstaining from voting in the UNSC, the Brazilian position was closer to that of its BRICS' partners, which have either abstained (India and South Africa) or voted against (China and Russia) the document. This apparent inconsistency, therefore, demands from us a more careful analysis, taking into account Brazil's foreign policy as a whole.

As explored in this paper's first section, the Brazilian foreign policy under Dilma Rousseff was very similar to the one that had been carried out during Lula da Silva's two mandates, having at their core both traditional principles (sovereignty, non-intervention, self-determination) and more recent ideas, such as an assertive participation in multilateral institutions, the strengthening of relations with the Global South and a critical – often revisionist – approach to international organizations, connected to the country's desire to undermine the hegemonic circles of decision-making. More embraced by Dilma Rousseff's foreign policy, nonetheless, was the defense of human rights, which, since the beginning of the new president's mandate, appeared to a fundamental pillar to be sustained by her government. In this sense, one can easily understand Brazil's stances in the UNHRC and in the UNGA, where it has been keen to condemn the violation of human rights by the Syrian government. The remaining question, thus, is: why has Brazil not voted favorably to the approval of Resolution S/2011/612, which also condemned the human rights situation in Syria?

In the second part of the paper, we could observe that, differently from the other documents in question, Resolution S/2011/612 was more coercive, opening up space for the imposition of sanctions if considered necessary by the Security Council. The reason for this lays in the fact that, as the primary body for maintaining international peace and security, the UNSC holds special powers that other UN committees do not. As provided for in the UN Charter, the Security Council may, in order to give effect to its decisions, adopt “measures not involving the use of armed force”, such as the “complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations” (United Nations 1945, online). If the Council believes, furthermore,

that those measures have proved to be inadequate or inefficient, it can take action “by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security” (United Nations 1945, online), implying that it can resort to the use of force.

When bearing this in mind, one can understand Brazil’s vote in draft resolution S/2011/612 not as a breach of its policy of defense of human rights, but rather as a pragmatic action. Acknowledging that the UNSC could, if it deemed necessary, authorize the use of force and that, as it had recently happened in Libya, the protection of the civilians could be invoked as a pretext for launching a politically motivated intervention, Brazil decided to abstain from voting in a resolution with potentially negative consequences. Its position in this case, therefore, shall be interpreted not as one of undermining the importance of human rights, but, instead, as one of respecting the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. Moreover, as clarified in Ambassador Viotti’s speech, Brazil’s abstention was motivated by the lack of a common ground between the Council’s members – phenomenon that has, in various situations, hampered the organism’s ability to take action. As such, Brazil’s stance can also be seen as a critique to the configuration of the Security Council, unchanged since its very creation and thus rendered obsolete and inadequate to solve current security issues. Hence, the demand for a reform of the UNSC, present in Brazil’s foreign policy since the Lula years, can also be traced as an element underlying the Brazil position in this situation.

Therefore, even though Brazil’s votes in the UN regarding the situation in Syria (2011) might initially indicate an erratic conduct, when analyzing them against the background of Dilma Rousseff’s foreign policy, one can observe that the Brazilian position has been, in fact, very consistent with the main guidelines governing its diplomacy and foreign action. Besides more firmly supporting the respect for human rights – an innovation brought about by Rousseff’s government –, Brazil’s stances and votes also encompass the defense of traditional principles in the country’s foreign policy, as well as a critical attitude towards institutions that, as the Security Council, uphold the prevailing international status quo.

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