

**SOUTH AMERICA IN THE BOLSONARO'S GOVERNMENT (2019-2022)**

*A AMÉRICA DO SUL NO GOVERNO BOLSONARO (2019-2022)*

*SUDAMÉRICA EN EL GOBIERNO DE BOLSONARO (2019-2022)*



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**ABSTRACT:** The main objective of this article is to discuss the changes in the guidelines of the Brazilian Foreign Policy during the government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) for South America. The subcontinent was an important platform for the Brazilian Foreign Policy for two decades after the end of the Cold War and the redemocratization of Brazil. Different strategies had its geographic surroundings as a fundamental diplomatic basis and bi- and multilateral actions strengthened South America as a geopolitical entity with a strong Brazilian role. However, the Bolsonaro's government was elected based on a discourse that sought substantive changes in traditional national diplomacy, shifting existing relations in the subcontinent. Our discussion will focus on Bolsonaro's foreign policy for South America and how the precepts that underpin Bolsonarism reflected in the diplomatic deployment to the region. We will make a brief recapitulation of the Brazilian Foreign Policy for South America since the 1990s. Then, we will present the concepts and ideological bases of Bolsonarism, as well as its international connection. Finally, we will discuss the diplomatic actions of the Bolsonarist period for the geographic surroundings and their consequences for existing regional projects.

**KEYWORDS:** South America. Bolsonaro. Foreign policy.

**RESUMO:** *O presente artigo tem como objetivo principal a discussão sobre as mudanças de diretrizes da Política Externa Brasileira (PEB) durante o governo de Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) para a América do Sul. O subcontinente foi durante duas décadas plataforma de ação internacional da PEB após o fim da Guerra Fria e a redemocratização do Brasil. Estratégias distintas tiveram o entorno geográfico como base diplomática fundamental e ações bi e multilaterais fortaleceram a América do Sul como entidade geopolítica com forte protagonismo brasileiro. Entretanto, o governo Bolsonaro se elegeu a partir de um discurso que buscava mudanças substantivas na tradicional diplomacia nacional, deslocando as relações existentes no subcontinente. Nossa discussão será focada na política externa de Bolsonaro para América do Sul e de como os preceitos que alicerçam o bolsonarismo refletiram no deslocamento diplomático para a região. Faremos uma breve recapitulação da PEB para a América do Sul desde os anos 1990. Em seguida, apresentaremos os conceitos e base ideológicas do bolsonarismo, assim como sua conexão internacional. Finalmente, discutiremos as ações diplomáticas do período bolsonarista para o entorno geográfico e suas consequências para os existentes projetos regionais existentes.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *América do Sul. Bolsonaro. Política externa.*

**RESUMEN:** *El objetivo principal de este artículo es discutir los cambios en las directrices de la Política Exterior brasileña durante el gobierno de Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) para América del Sur. El subcontinente fue una plataforma importante para la Política Exterior brasileña durante dos décadas después del final de la Guerra Fría y la redemocratización de Brasil. Diferentes estrategias tuvieron los alrededores geográfica como base diplomática fundamental y acciones bilaterales y multilaterales fortalecieron a América del Sur como una entidad geopolítica con un fuerte papel brasileño. Sin embargo, el gobierno de Bolsonaro fue elegido con base en un discurso que buscaba cambios sustantivos en la diplomacia nacional tradicional, modificando las relaciones existentes en el subcontinente. Nuestra discusión se centrará en la política exterior de Bolsonaro para América del Sur y cómo los preceptos que sustentan el bolsonarismo se reflejaron en el despliegue diplomático en la región. Haremos una breve recapitulación de la Política Exterior de Brasil para América del Sur desde la década de 1990. Luego, presentaremos los conceptos y bases ideológicas del bolsonarismo, así como su conexión internacional. Finalmente, discutiremos las acciones diplomáticas del período bolsonarista para el entorno geográfico y sus consecuencias para los proyectos regionales existentes.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *América del Sur. Bolsonaro. Política exterior.*

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## Introduction

South America in Brazilian Foreign Policy (BFP) has become a priority since the beginning of the 2000s. The First Meeting of South American Presidents in Brasília was a milestone in this process. The end of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's second presidential term (1995-2002) and Luís Inácio Lula da Silva's administration (2003-2010) marked the subcontinent as a strategic focus for Brazil's international projection.

However, the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022) meant a substantive change from the point of view of domestic and international politics. His election represented the rise of new politically and ideologically organized social groups known as the "new right". A worldview that sought to deconstruct policies established over the last two decades since Brazil's re-democratization. In the wake of these deconstructions, substantive changes in traditional national diplomacy were made operational, displacing South America as the strategic platform of the BFP.

The Bolsonaro administration's diplomatic dissonance with a foreign policy previously established for two decades on the subcontinent is the focus of our analysis. We will briefly recap the BFP for South America since the 1990s. We will then present the concepts and ideological basis of Bolsonarism and the new right in order to better understand the conceptual

framework that gives rise to the changes in the BFP. Finally, we will point out some diplomatic actions of the Bolsonaro period towards the geographical environment and their consequences for existing regional projects.

### **South America in Brazilian foreign policy (FHC, Lula, Dilma, Temer)**

Brazil is the largest country in the South American subcontinent. Its population, economy, military strength, science and technology place it in a comparative position of prominence in South America. A renowned diplomacy that has its origins in the Baron of Rio Branco has strengthened its role in regional international relations.

Since its re-democratization and the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the Brazilian government has sought to play a leading role through its financing capacity via national banks, through the execution of projects via Brazilian companies and through its bi- and multilateral diplomatic action. The influence of Brazil as a state actor and of private Brazilian actors differs from that of the countries around it.

During the administrations of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) and Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010), South America became a platform for international action. The First Meeting of South American Presidents in Brasilia in 2000, promoted by the Brazilian Foreign Ministry during Cardoso's administration, represented the start of a new relationship between the country and the subcontinent and established a milestone in South American regional relations by launching important projects such as IIRSA.

Brazil's foreign policy strategies under the governments of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) and Lula da Silva (Lula) differed and continued. FHC, following on from his predecessors Fernando Collor de Mello and Itamar Franco, sought dialogue with the world, with international organizations (UN, WTO), with regional initiatives (Mercosur) and hemispheric initiatives (FTAA) in a strategy called "autonomy through integration" (VIGEVANI; OLIVEIRA, 2004, p. 34).

Lula's strategy was "autonomy through diversification", which consisted of contributing to a greater international balance by seeking to mitigate the unilateralism of the post-9/11 world; strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations in order to increase the country's weight in international political and economic negotiations; strengthening diplomatic relations in order to take advantage of the possibilities for greater economic, financial, technological and cultural exchange; and avoiding agreements that could jeopardize development in the long term.

Regarding the differences and similarities between the two governments, Vigevani and Cepaluni (2007) point out that the Lula period did not deviate from the historically established principle for Brazilian diplomacy that foreign policy is an instrument for economic development, which seeks to maintain and expand Brazil's autonomy on the international stage. We would point out that there have been changes in ideas and strategies for dealing with the country's problems and objectives posed by its position, history and destiny, but these changes are not essentially different between the two governments (p. 322).

For FHC, regional integration was central to the Brazilian agenda, as it had been since the mid-1980s. With him, the process of regional integration was seen as an instrument with which Brazil could compete for a larger space in the world. For Lula, Mercosur remained an important project to be expanded with the South American Community of Nations (Sacn), later transformed into the Union of South American Nations (Unasur). The projects that make up IIRSA gained momentum under Lula through Brazilian banks, companies and diplomatic action, making the integration of South America a priority on Brazil's agenda.

This Brazilian agenda, which aimed to strengthen the regionalization of South America, had some elements that helped bring the countries closer together. For example, after a decade of neoliberal governments, the countries were taken over by a wave of left-wing governments in the region - which seems to demonstrate an attitude of skepticism about liberal globalization that reproduced the inequalities between North and South.

In addition, the convergence of thoughts among the region's leaders on the formulation of the integrationist project, not limiting it to "economic and commercial issues, broadening its scope to political, social and security aspects; a greater consolidation of the idea of South America in the foreign policy of the countries of the subcontinent, which presents a greater political, economic and security unity than the idea of Latin America" are important factors in strengthening the regionalization of South America (CERVO, 2008, p. 163, our translation).

This set of regional initiatives saw intense participation from Brazil and it is precisely this intensity that would mark the distinction between the Lula period and its predecessor. The direct involvement of the president and his top bureaucrats in this process was strong. Lula used the resource of presidential diplomacy more frequently than his predecessor, in other words, he participated personally in international relations, whether through pronouncements, participation in international forums, or acting directly in negotiations and becoming the main driver of foreign policy. The main destination of Lula's trips was South America.

The role of senior bureaucrats in South America in the regionalization process also stood out, especially with Chancellor Celso Amorim - Foreign Minister throughout the Lula administration and Minister of Defence under Dilma Rousseff - Minister of Defence Nelson Jobim (2007-2011) and the President's special advisor for international affairs Marco Aurélio Gracia. In 2008, Jobim visited all the countries in the region with two objectives: the construction of a regional defense identity and the creation of a South American war industry.

This dynamic in Brazilian foreign policy sought to promote the consolidation of the subcontinent as a transnational political entity with a minimum unity and an institutional framework based on common principles and macro-objectives in international relations. Regarding this entity, Wanderley Messias da Costa states that

Considering the basic characteristics of its initial format and its current development, this model of regional arrangement is the only project on this scale that seeks to reproduce in its general aspects the European experience, in which the main ambition of its member states has always been to combine maximum economic integration with a transnational political-institutional macro-concert. In this sense, it differs greatly from the conventional model that has been adopted by most of the other regional blocs, in which the limits of consultation between their member states are defined in advance and the objectives are explicitly limited to economic and commercial matters. This is why, subject to the respective and obvious particularities of these two current experiences, South American integration here tends to reproduce the path followed by the European Union to date, in which the broadest strategic horizon that its creators have in mind is the constitution and consolidation of a vast and ingenious transnational regional system of governance (COSTA, 2009, our translation).

However, the construction of South America as a Brazilian strategic project in the first decade of the 21st century came up against fragmentations in the subcontinent that jeopardized the development of the project. For Amado Cervo:

If there is a political South America, made up for the most part of left-wing governments that have created an environment favorable to strengthening the pole of power, there are two economic South Americas, one liberal and primary, which seeks a free trade agreement with the United States, the other industrial and developmental, which focuses on deepening integration between the neighbors (CERVO, 2008, p. 203, our translation).

The role of a leader or leaders in consolidating a cohesive and unfragmented region is fundamental in the regionalization process. While data naturally attributes Brazil a relevant role in this process, for Jaime Preciado, Brazil's role in this context is that of a semi-periphery with aspirations to become a global power. And its role as an active semi-periphery

has not only been consolidated but has also increased its aspirations to position itself as a global power. Brazil's size and geographical position have consolidated it as a state of great strategic importance, as it has borders with all the countries of South America, as well as the largest territorial extension and population in Latin America, in addition to a gigantic coastline on the Atlantic, with preferential zones, key to trade and the exploitation of off-shore resources (PRECIADO, 2008, p. 262, our translation).

However, Brazil's role as an active semi-periphery does not necessarily give it a leading position in the region, an issue that is unclear in the history of Brazilian foreign policy. During the FHC period, it was believed that leadership was not proclaimed, but had to be exercised. In this sense, the issue was not given much prominence during his administration. In the Lula period, on the other hand, the issue was not ostentatiously raised in the Brazilian political debate. The desire to play a leading role in the region and among developing countries was introduced and there has been a greater demand from South American countries for Brazil (VIGEVANI; CEPALUNI, 2007).

The demand from the countries of the region is not necessarily directed at one leader alone, but at Brazil's role as paymaster - the role of the country or countries that absorb the costs of integration and promote the construction of the collective public goods necessary for the success of an integration process. This role has been played by France and Germany in the construction, consolidation and maintenance of the European Union and in South America Brazil would be the country capable of constituting itself as paymaster.

In the article *Bounded by the reality of trade: practical limits to a South American region* (2005), Sean Burges defends the thesis that regionalism in South America has emerged as a project without a leader willing to play the role of paymaster. However, it serves the interest of the country that could exercise it: Brazil. When the author tries to answer the question of what exactly is driving the regional impulse in South America, his answer - which took into account the expansion of trade in the region, the nature of investments and the progress of infrastructure integration - is that there is an emphasis on the energy sector, with Petrobras' activities pointing to a strategy of guaranteeing the necessary supplies of oil and gas to fuel Brazil's economy. Even with the growth of manufacturing trade across the region, it is energy demand together with Brazilian leadership ambitions that are the drivers of regionalism, not cooperative economic growth. For Burges:

a region will not fully integrate if it does not offer returns of a sufficient magnitude to incite political pressure for deepening from economic and civil society actors. With these theoretical guides in mind the relevant point becomes one of what is not happening in South America to bolster

regionalism. Integrated production chains are not forming. Investment remains in resource- and market-seeking mode. Intra-continental transportation and trade facilitation linkages are modernising very slowly (BURGES, 2005, p. 450).

Finally, the author concludes that:

the economic potential of a South American region lacks the attraction necessary to elicit support for an enthusiastic pursuit of the project. Indeed, the unilateral nature of the benefits arising from the elements of the regional vision enacted to date are bringing the political future of the Project into question as the other South American states become increasingly dissatisfied with a largely Brazilian-led venture that offers few immediate benefits and may herald a future of dependence on an emergent regional Brazilian hegemony (BURGES, 2005, p. 450).

Dilma Rousseff's government (2011-2016) was marked by strong international and especially domestic turbulence. An institutional crisis and an impeachment process ended the period. The decline in the prices of mining and agricultural commodities, which are strong Brazilian products, and a management of public accounts that was highly questioned internally drained much of the strength of Rousseff's government, directly reflecting on her foreign policy in general.

The BFP's strategy during this period was substantially the same as that of Lula da Silva's previous government. However, in addition to the crises already mentioned, we can attribute part of the decline in Brazilian international action to the profile of the president, who was less familiar with the international arena than her successor.

Regarding this decline, Cervo and Lessa (2014, p. 149, our translation) point out that "after a phase of the country's rise as an emerging power, Brazil's international insertion went into decline between 2011 and 2014". Our geographical surroundings were no different. Initiatives and regional prominence have been curtailed and the expectations created in the region about Brazil's role as a driving force behind regional integration and crisis resolution have been dashed (SARAIVA, 2016).

Neither did her successor Michel Temer change the scenario of Brazil's declining action in the region. On the contrary, consumed by the internal crisis of an impeachment process questioned internally and externally, Temer has sought to distance himself from any Workers' Party project, including action in South America.

The appointment of José Serra to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is symbolic of this search for distance. The deconstruction of the Lula era in the BFP, seen as partisan and ideologized, was a project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Temer government.



The supposed "de-ideologization" of the BFP was outlined in the ten guidelines that Serra announced in his inauguration speech. The then minister believed that

Diplomacy will once again transparently and uncompromisingly reflect the legitimate values of Brazilian society and the interests of its economy, at the service of Brazil as a whole and no longer the convenience and ideological preferences of a political party and its allies abroad<sup>3</sup> (our translation)

More important than the MFA's actions in the Temer period for South America, even because they were of little significance, we should highlight the political contours that the Brazilian executive has taken on. The construction of the BFP during the Lula period has been negated as a project, especially by Temer's successor, Jair Messias Bolsonaro.

### **Bolsonaro and bolsonarism**

The election of Jair Bolsonaro to the Presidency of the Republic in 2018 needs to be understood from two perspectives: on the one hand, as the high point of the crisis of the social pact built during the process of re-democratization in Brazil (SILVA, 2021a) - the corollary of which was, according to Sallum (2004), the structuring of the New Republic, starting in 1994; and, on the other, as the institutional outlet of the political, ideological and organizational rise of new social groups in Brazil: the new right (SILVA, 2021b).

Two brief conceptual definitions are necessary here: firstly, despite the polysemy of the concepts of right and left - as well as the repeated attempts (epistemological and political) to obsolete this dichotomy, in defense of the existence of a post-ideological world (an assertion that had a lot of force throughout the 1990s, in the wake of English New Labour and the theoretical influence of Giddens' work) - here we assume the definition provided by Bobbio (2011), according to which what separates right and left is the greater or lesser acceptance of inequality as the natural order of the world; In other words, the further to the right, the more inequalities (in their various dimensions) would be accepted as natural, and the further to the left, the more they would be accepted as socially and politically constructed.

The second definition concerns the novelty presented by the so-called new right - represented by the new social movements, parties and political leaders that have emerged in Brazil in the wake of the crisis of the New Republic, especially since the window of opportunity represented by the June 2013 protests. Beyond the conjunctural element, the combination of

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<sup>3</sup> More at: <http://www.funag.gov.br/ipri/images/repertorio/diretrizes-governo-Temer-Ministro-Serra.pdf>

five distinctive characteristics allows this myriad of political expressions (monarchists, anarcho-capitalists, ultra-liberals, militarists, Christian fundamentalists, masculinists, etc. ) is, on the one hand, agglutinated under a single sign and, on the other, constitutes a new phenomenon in the Brazilian social fabric: a metapolitical framework, that is, the understanding of the cultural arena as a privileged locus of political dispute and its hegemony in it an *ex ante* condition for the dispute of institutional spaces; anti-intellectualism, understood both as the open and frontal rejection of the traditional instances of production, legitimation and reproduction of regimes of truth - notably, universities, research centers and schools -; anti-elitism, politically translated as the ethical, aesthetic and epistemological valorization of the average citizen and common sense as an instrument for apprehending reality; the instrumentalization of politically incorrect discourse as a weapon of anti-system rhetoric; and the synthesis between economic liberalism and moral conservatism, brought together by the elevation of the patriarchal family to the position of ordering category of the social world (SILVA, 2021a).

The first decades of the 21st century have seen, in much of the world, the political and ideological rise of new groups openly identified with a reinvented right (CARAPANĂ, 2018; PINHEIRO-MACHADO, 2019; ROCHA, 2018), and with a strong connection to a profound rearrangement resulting from the structural crisis of capitalism in its neoliberal matrix since 2008. The crisis of hegemony of neoliberal sociability - and, by extension, of the institutions and values associated with it - is the backdrop for the constitution of the new contemporary right (FRASER, 2018; PINHEIRO-MACHADO, 2019; SILVA, 2021a).

In the case of Brazil, these new right-wing groups - which began to organize in the mid-2000s (ROCHA, 2018) - found in the 2018 ticket led by then congressman Jair Bolsonaro, the institutional outlet of a long process of ideological dispute within civil society. According to Rocha (2018), these groups began to organize politically in Brazil during the height of Lulism, although they were first structured as a counter-public, given the hegemony in the public sphere of what Burity (2018) calls a model of subjectivation based on the idea of tolerance, and with strong support from liberal pluralism (SILVA, 2021a). As the national political debate was structured around a centre-left government, led by the Workers' Party, and an opposition hegemonized by a center-right that did not even openly acknowledge its links to the right - the ashamed right (POWER, 2000) - led by the Brazilian Social Democracy Party, there was no room in the public sphere for the dissemination of more radicalized opinions on the right. The relative consensus around a more inclusive lexicon, together with the general acceptance of

democracy as a non-negotiable value, became a structuring ideological component of the New Republic in Brazil (SILVA, 2021a).

As a result of this veto on right-wing radicalism in the public sphere, individuals ideologically identified with the far-right found an environment on the internet to first recognize their "equals" and then form a more or less cohesive group through discussion groups, social networks and internet forums anchored in radicalized agendas and debauched language (DI CARLO; KAMRADT, 2018; ROCHA, 2018). Although, from then on, they were able to recognize their collective condition in virtual environments - embodied by the sharing of ultraconservative (albeit diffuse) values and ideas - they lacked a crucial element to make the transition from a "group in itself" to a "group for itself": a more organized political and ideological instrument. If the virtual environment gave these individuals the opportunity to recognize themselves as a group with shared values, contact with the thought of the ideologue Olavo de Carvalho provided them with political language (ROCHA, 2021).

Carvalho's importance in the process of establishing the new Brazilian right - first as a counter-public and then as a central political actor - is fundamentally due to two factors: firstly, because - even if he was not responsible for politically organizing the camp, he was able to translate the anguish of important portions of the Brazilian population into an effective argument (with his debauched, ironic and aggressive verve), giving explanatory body to resentment, and thus enabling the rooting of an ideology built on the synthesis between moral conservatism and defense of the free market (ROCHA, 2018; TEITELBAUM, 2020); and, secondly, due to the recognition by leading figures in the country's liberal and conservative camps of its role in building spaces in the public sphere that are more receptive to conservative agendas - previously "blocked" by the imperative of "political correctness" (BERLANZA, 2017). Given his ability to give the groups that make up the new Brazilian right a minimum degree of homogeneity and awareness of their own role, Olavo de Carvalho is their main organic intellectual (SILVA, 2021b).

The hard core of the Olavist worldview - which, by extension, to a large extent structures the worldview of the new Brazilian right - can be summarized in the following arguments: supported by the traditionalist school (TEITELBAUM, 2020, SILVA, 2021b), Olavo de Carvalho takes a very critical stance towards the knowledge produced in universities - both from an epistemological and political point of view. From an epistemological point of view, because he maintains that the only way to access knowledge (which is universal and transcendent) is through individual and introspective reflection, which has in mythological

intermediation (in this case, Christianity) the inescapable bridge to access the logos - whose evidence can be grasped through common sense (CARVALHO, 1999). From a political point of view, because he argues that - as a strategy derived from the defeat of the armed resistance to the military dictatorship - the Brazilian left would have gradually built up a firm hegemony in all the instances that produce culture in the country (universities, research centers, the press and even cinema) (CARVALHO, 1994; 1998; 1999; SILVA, 2021b). This is where another crucial component of Olavista rhetoric comes in: conspiracy. The argument is based on the premise that there is a major conspiracy underway, which is why the search for knowledge could only be effective if it shared - as in the ontological principle of revelation - this same premise as its founding myth: since the founding of the Communist Party of Brazil in 1922, there has been an uninterrupted conspiracy in the country aimed at destroying the pillars of Western civilization through the destruction of capitalism (ROCHA, 2021).

The rhetoric of conspiracy, moreover, is not circumstantial in his work, but structural: taking up arguments from Guénon, Lasch and Voegelin (the latter in particular), Carvalho identifies a conspiracy of great proportions that has existed throughout much of history, whose origins could be traced back to Epicurus' own classical materialism:

Conspiracism occupies a privileged position in Carvalho's work: the entire march of modernity could be summarized as a conspiracy of secular elites seeking to supplant the explanatory and normative centrality of religion - this is, in fact, the great theme of his book "O Jardim das Aflições" (The Garden of Afflictions). Western civilization - conceived as the heir to the Judeo-Christian tradition and centred on the traditional family and conventional sex (PINHEIRO-MACHADO, 2019) - would have found in Christianity the most elaborate symbolic construction of both a transcendent universal truth and the necessary intermediation (*pontifex*) for access to it in the figure of Christ himself: the logos made flesh - a thesis borrowed from Voegelin (1992). However, with the advent of modernity, and especially after the transformation impulses of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, new elites emerged with the declared aim of establishing a materialist "civil theology" that would supplant Christian ontology and therefore establish the primacy of cultural relativism and absolute historicism, eroding the traditional foundations and values of Western civilization. In this sense, the communists would be the contemporary spearhead of a process that has its origins in the influence of the materialist philosophy of Epicurus - for Marxism, as for Epicureanism, there is no possibility of objective truth, and therefore theory serves no purpose other than to rhetorically stimulate practical action (SILVA, 2021b, p. 8, our translation).

The Olavist worldview can be summarized in the following logical concatenation:

1. The left would be axiomatically mistaken for two reasons: on the one hand, because by focusing its efforts of reflection on becoming, instead of observing the imperative of past experience, it would lose analytical capacity; and, on the other hand, because it would actively refrain from explaining the world as it is in order - in a demiurgic delirium - to shape it according to its will;

2. The strategy mobilized by the left to shape the world according to its wishes would be to destroy all the cultural heritage accumulated by Western civilization and crystallized in common sense through its hegemonic status within the culture-producing spheres (universities, research centers, the press, cinema, etc.);

3. In this process, it would be essential to destroy Metaphysics and Religion (given their attachment to the conception of a "universal truth"), and establish relativistic materialism as the new "civil theology";

4. Therefore, if the left dominates the production of culture in the traditional instances of production, reproduction and legitimization of regimes of truth, and uses it as an instrument of political struggle with the aim of destroying Western civilization, it would be essential for the right to fight for new regimes of truth produced in spaces other than universities - especially social networks.

If, on the one hand, the embryonic organization of the new right took place in the virtual environment, and as a counter-public, their political and electoral rise must be understood in the context of another process of vast magnitude in Brazil: the demise of the New Republic (SILVA, 2021a). Although these groups took advantage of the window of opportunity provided by the social effervescence of the massive protests of 2013 - when, for example, the MBL, Vem Pra Rua, Revoltados Online and a myriad of other social movements of the new right were created - their rise to the center of the Brazilian political dispute is a symptom of the crisis of hegemony of the social pact built on the back of re-democratization (SILVA, 2021a).

### **Bolsonaro's foreign policy for South America**

The history of Brazilian foreign policy and diplomacy has consolidated a tradition and government bureaucratic structure that is internationally recognized for its competence and professionalism. The different foreign policy strategies of different governments have not structurally affected the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this sense, the Bolsonaro government

has shaken the foundation of Brazil's international presence. Naming and identifying a coherent political strategy in the period is a substantive intellectual challenge in the face of uncoordinated or chaotic movements.

In the article "Bolsonaro e a reorientação da política exterior brasileira" (Bolsonaro and the reorientation of Brazilian foreign policy) (2019)<sup>4</sup>, Vidigal points out that Bolsonaro's BFP represented an abdication of the traditions of autonomy and development of Brazilian diplomacy. According to the author, among other elements we can see a predominance of the strength of economic liberalism in one of its shallower versions and alignment without reciprocity (with the United States) as the hallmarks of Bolsonaro's BFP.

Saraiva and Silva's (2019)<sup>5</sup> analysis sought to understand two important variables in foreign policy: ideology and pragmatism. For the authors, looking only at Bolsonaro's first year in office,

we have seen the different impacts of ideology and pragmatism on the Bolsonaro government's foreign policy so far. Its defenders can be summarized, in the case of the ideologues, in the group called <<olavist>> (influenced by the writer Olavo de Carvalho), whose main representative in foreign policy would be Chancellor Ernesto Araújo, supported by Eduardo Bolsonaro. Among the pragmatists, the military and domestic groups that would suffer directly from the practical consequences of actions driven purely by ideology, such as sectors of agriculture. Its main representative has been Vice President Hamilton Mourão (p. 130, our translation).

Paulo Roberto de Almeida - diplomat, academic and traditional critic of "Lulopetista" diplomacy - presents a collection of writings on Bolsonaro's BFP and points to the "demolition" of Brazilian diplomacy<sup>6</sup>. Almeida (2022)<sup>7</sup> points out that

Candidate Bolsonaro's government program already officially announced in August 2018 that he would make a small revolution in foreign policy and diplomacy, even if its wording was as schizophrenic as possible. The announced break with all the standards and guidelines of previous foreign policies and diplomacies was so explicit that its basic lines contained in the document delivered to the Superior Electoral Court (2018, p. 79) - probably made by complete amateurs in international affairs (p. 53, our translation)

<sup>4</sup> See VIDIGAL, C. E. Bolsonaro e a reorientação da política exterior brasileira. *Meridiano 47* (UNB), v. 20, p. 1-16, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> See SARAIVA, M. G.; SILVA, A. V. C. Ideologia e pragmatismo na política externa de Jair Bolsonaro. *Relações Internacionais* (Lisboa), v. 64, p. 117-137, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> See ALMEIDA, P. R. *Apogeu e demolição da política externa: itinerários da diplomacia brasileira*. 1. ed. Curitiba: Appris, 2021. v. 1. 291p.

<sup>7</sup> See ALMEIDA, P. R. Rupturas e continuidades na política externa brasileira, 1985-2023: vicissitudes da diplomacia no Brasil. *CEBRI revista*, v. 1, p. 40-55, 2022.

Finally, we would like to highlight the work by Monica Hirst and Tadeu Morato Macie<sup>8</sup>, "*A Política Externa do Brasil nos tempos do governo Bolsonaro*" (Brazil's Foreign Policy during the Bolsonaro administration) (2022). The research analyzed three pillars on which Bolsonaro's BFP was based. These are: ideological political core, liberal-conservative economic policy and the security and defense complex. These pillars led Brazil's external action from a regional and international point of view.

The authors point out that from an international point of view, the pillars of Bolsonaro's BFP can be summarized as follows (s/p):

**Political ideological core:** Anti-globalist activism, alignment with the Trump administration and rapprochement with the circle of countries with extreme right-wing regimes;

**Liberal-conservative economic policy:** Attracting international investment, reconfiguring Brazil's presence in the international economy and preserving economic ties with China;

**Security and Defense Complex:** Strengthening the relationship with the USA (Southern Command), recognition as an extra-NATO ally, military and security cooperation with like-minded governments - such as Israel, the United Arab Emirates and India..

To Hirst and Macie (2022):

The combination of latent denialism and isolationism strengthens the anti-regionalist profile of Bolsonaro's foreign policy. Brazilian diplomacy has produced a policy of "bad neighbourliness", in which it gives up soft power variables and imposes a dissuasive presence that is accompanied by economic ties with low institutionalization and a political dialogue of monosyllables, with no pretensions of occupying spaces in multilateral institutions at regional and/or global level. At the same time, by defending an unconditional alignment with the Trump administration's international positions (including publicly positioning itself in favor of the Republican candidate's re-election in the 2020 elections), the Bolsonaro administration has installed the centrality of the link with the United States in Brazilian Foreign Policy (n/p, our translation).

Bolsonaro's possible logic or strategy in diplomacy has extended to South America. In fact, it is possible to observe an intensified effort to seek a "revolution in foreign policy and diplomacy", given that the last two decades have seen strong Brazilian regional action by previous governments. The pillars of Bolsonaro's BFP - analyzed by Hirst and Macie and mentioned above - are evident in South America.

<sup>8</sup> Text presented at the seminar "Gobernanza democrática y regionalismo en América Latina ¿en crisis o recomposición?", at the Colegio de Mexico in February 2020. Available: <https://preprints.scielo.org/index.php/scielo/preprint/download/4771/9230/9673>. Access: Mar. 2023.

The "ideological political nucleus" had its core in the relationship with Venezuela. "Brazil is going to turn into Venezuela" was a Bolsonaro campaign motto during the 2018 election process. The "meme" sought engagement not only by referring to the country's economic situation. The "communist threat" was also a fundamental basis for looking at the neighboring country and, especially, the Workers' Party<sup>9</sup>.

Since Hugo Chavez's rise to power (1999-2013), the rapprochement between Brazil and Venezuela has intensified. These partnerships have resulted in Venezuela's inclusion in MERCOSUR (2012), the defeat of the United States' plan to create the Free Trade Area of the Americas (2005) and a positive trade windfall for Brazil of more than US\$4 billion. These actions may be the result of ideological rapprochement, but they have strong pragmatic results.

The fall in the price of the oil barrel and Venezuela's consequent economic decline was compounded by a political crisis that Chavez's successor, Nicolas Maduro, is still trying to deal with today. An intense migratory process towards Brazil, more specifically towards the state of Roraima, supported Bolsonaro's arguments for breaking Brazil's relations with the neighboring country during the Bolsonaro administration.

Gilberto Maringoni points out that

Jair Bolsonaro has chosen Venezuela as an enemy country in South America. Throughout his first year, he has sought to isolate and attack the Maduro government in international forums, faithfully allying himself with the US State Department. The result is a loss of regional credibility for Brazilian diplomacy (p. 173, our translation)<sup>10</sup>

Another move by Bolsonaro to deconstruct the existing legacy of the BFP for South America was Brazil's rapprochement with Chile, more precisely Bolsonaro's rapprochement with Sebastián Piñera. Chile was Bolsonaro's first international travel destination in South America precisely because of the ideological alignment between the presidents.

This rapprochement with conservative South American leaders was strengthened with the participation of the recently created Forum for the Progress of South America (PROSUR).

This Forum set out to renew and strengthen the integration process of South American nations. An initiative of Chile and Colombia that was joined by Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina,

<sup>9</sup> See. CHAGAS, V.; MODESTO, M.; MAGALHAES, D. O Brasil vai virar Venezuela: medo, memes e enquadramentos emocionais no WhatsApp pró-Bolsonaro. *ESFERAS*, p. 1, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> See MARINGONI, G. Venezuela, o novo espantalho. *In*: Gilberto Maringoni; Giorgio Romano Schutte, Tatiana Berringer. (Org.). *As bases da política externa bolsonarista: relações internacionais em um mundo em transformação*. 1ed. Santo André: Editora da Universidade Federal do ABC, 2021, v. 1, p. 173-182.



Peru and Paraguay in 2019, a period that saw the rise of the right wing in the governments of these countries. An obvious regional attempt to undermine UNASUR.

In relation to the "Security and Defence Complex", three BFP movements stand out: the military rapprochement with the United States, Brazil's withdrawal from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the securitization of Venezuelan migration to Brazil.

These movements are representative in that they cohere and synthesize the regional BFP. The relationship with the US has historically had a pendulum relationship with the regional relationship, i.e. a rapprochement with the superpower to the detriment of the relationship with its geographical surroundings. The weakening of UNASUR, an intergovernmental organization built on a Brazilian initiative, weakens regional multilateralism. The reception of Venezuelan migrants in Brazil by the military evokes the relationship established with Venezuela and what it represented in the Bolsonaro government.

Hirst and Macie (2022) point out that:

At the regional level, the prospect of South American cooperation in the field of defense has been completely abandoned, making Brazil's involvement in the UNASUR Defense Council a dead letter. On the other hand, there is an attempt to align with US perspectives on security issues in Latin America, with a greater degree of permissibility for the presence of US military personnel in the region. South America's northern neighbourhood has become a space for improving a dissuasive military presence, articulated with defensive perceptions of governments, organizations and movements identified as political-ideological threats. There has been a growing militarization of the Amazon region, both because of the crisis with Venezuela and the resulting migratory processes, as well as in relation to fighting fires in the region during 2019. This dynamic has led to a strengthening of the border agenda, associated with the securitization of humanitarian aid, which in 2018 led to the setting up of Operation Acolhida in the state of Roraima (HIRST; MACIEL, 2019, n.p., our translation).

The liberal-conservative amalgam deserves special attention, especially as it represents the hard core of the ideological framework of the new right (CHALOUB; PERLATTO, 2015; ROCHA, 2018; SILVA, 2021b). Despite the apparent contradiction between two traditions of Western political thought that, in fact, were born antagonistic, there is a deep affinity of meaning between neoliberalism and neoconservatism (BROWN, 2019; NETTO *et al.*, 2019; SILVA, 2021b), made possible by three movements: the deconstruction - throughout the 19th and 20th centuries - of three foundational pillars of liberalism (the Republic as the normative horizon of modernity, contractualism and jusnaturalism) (SILVA, 2021b); the acceptance, on the part of the conservative tradition, of economic modernity (i.e. the market economy) (BROWN, 2019);

and the common identification of the patriarchal family as the ordering category of modern social reproduction (NETTO *et al.*, 2019).

Considering that liberalism, as a philosophical field (and ideological expression par excellence of the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary phase), was born as an insurgent counterpoint to the absolutist state and the oligarchic monopoly of land ownership, anchored in the tripod of individualism, jusnaturalism and contractualism (BOBBIO, 2017), and organized from an essentially egalitarian ethos (KERSTENETSKY, 2005; DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016), and, in turn, that conservatism was born as a direct reaction to the bourgeois revolutions (whose main and most emblematic expression was the French Revolution), especially in terms of its egalitarian substratum (MIGUEL, 2002), it is clear that any association between these areas would only be possible through ideological falsification or a tactical conjunctural alliance. However, the liberal-conservative amalgam is a fundamental part of the ideological framework of the new right, in general, and Bolsonaro, more specifically (NETTO *et al.*, 2019).

In order to understand this structural association, it is necessary to understand the profound process of ontological restructuring that liberalism went through between the 18th and 20th centuries, from which its hegemonic expressions were stripped of any egalitarian bias and, to the limit, also of its jusnaturalist/contractualist nature (SILVA, 2021b): if Schumpeter's blunt criticism (both of the classical debate on democracy and of his distributist contemporaries, from Keynes to Hobhouse and Dewey) largely sealed the abandonment of the notion of the Republic (in the Rousseauian sense) as the normative horizon of modernity in the liberal key (MIGUEL, 2002), the Chicago and Austrian schools were the main culprits in the abandonment of contractualism (i. e., popular sovereignty as the exclusive legitimization of power) (SILVA, 2021b).

From a concrete point of view, the liberal and conservative agendas made up the hard core of Bolsonaro's political agenda, including his foreign policy - from the imperative decision to try to get Brazil into the OECD to Brazil's adherence to the so-called Geneva Consensus (signed in October 2020) - an association of countries that, in the wake of the advance of the new right-wing globally, endorsed the approval of a document that defends a strong setback in the women's reproductive rights agenda, supporting the criminalization of abortion under any circumstances.

## **Final considerations**

A solid diplomatic experience since the Baron of Rio Branco has shaped Itamaraty's technical and political expertise in building a consistent foreign policy. Different strategies have marked Brazil's rapprochement with different poles of power and different interests at international level. Latin America has been a strategic region in the BFP of some governments. Over the last two decades, South America has become a pillar of Brazil's international projection, spanning different government periods.

The election of Bolsonaro in 2018 and the worldview of the social groups represented by Bolsonarism was a substantive hiatus in Brazil's relationship with the rest of the world, and especially with South America. The search for a revolution in foreign policy and diplomacy in the four years of the Bolsonaro government has led to rifts with traditional partners and the abandonment of a regionalist policy.

The conception of the world that underpins Bolsonarism, as we have pointed out, is based on anti-intellectualism, anti-elitism, the use of politically incorrect discourse as a weapon for anti-system rhetoric and the synthesis between economic liberalism and moral conservatism. However, another element that ideologically supports political discourse and action in the international sphere is conspiracism.

As we have pointed out, Bolsonaro's argumentative starting point is based on the premise that there is a major conspiracy underway, orchestrated by the left and operationalized through globalism. A global leftist strategy capable of shaping the world in such a way as to destroy the cultural heritage of Western civilization. A cultural domination by the global left in the production, reproduction and legitimization of regimes of truth.

In the conspiracist view, the fight against globalism needs new regimes that originate from the dissolution of the legacy of the global left. A South America, constituted and consolidated in a transnational regional system of governance, stemming from a progressive wave in the subcontinent, represents a major threat in Bolsonaro's conspiracist worldview.

The hollowing out of regional institutions such as UNASUR, the dissolution of relations established with traditional partners such as Venezuela and the enthusiasm for PROSUR are some of the actions of the Bolsonaro period in the quest to deconstruct a legacy stemming from globalism.

The change of power in South America over the last two years has pointed to a new progressive moment in the domestic and international politics of some countries. The center-

left has made a comeback in countries like Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Colombia. A scenario still to be studied in terms of the regionalization process.

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