

# The Strategy of Chaos: Brazilian Foreign Policy under Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022)

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## Abstract

The aims of the article are to identify the main factors that have defined Brazil's international insertion during Jair Bolsonaro's administration as well as to explain the main foreign policy changes from 2019 to 2022. I argue that, although the alignment with the Donald Trump's administration structured the main axes of Bolsonaro's foreign policy and the ideological discourse in foreign policy has not been abandoned by the Brazilian government during Bolsonaro's term, some adjustments were necessary in sensitive topics such as relations with China and the Venezuelan crisis to adapt to the interests of relevant segments of Brazilian politics. Bolsonaro's foreign policy depends heavily on the outcome of the struggle between the pragmatic economic and military members of his administration on one side, and the religious and conservative ideologists on the other. The conclusions indicate that domestic interests – particularly the need to please Bolsonaro's political base, which turned Brazil into a violator of indigenous, LGBTQIAP+, and other minorities' rights – are more important than global commitments Brazil has previously assumed.

**Keywords:** Brazil, foreign policy, diplomacy, Jair Bolsonaro, ideology, pragmatism

## 1. Introduction

In the context of the 2018 Brazilian general elections, the far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro, the Social Liberal Party's (PSL, its acronym in Portuguese) candidate, was the winner of the presidential race. He received 55 per cent of valid votes in a second-round run-off election for the Brazilian presidency, which shook the political establishment and signalled that voters were outraged with the corruption associated with the old-style political bargaining and horse-trading with political parties. Bolsonaro focused on issue-based interests of distinct sectors of Brazilian society – dubbed the “Bible-Bullet-Beef” caucus, formed by the evangelical, the armament, and the rural factions – and intended to implement more market-friendly economic policies that could support business and stimulate hopes for economic recovery (Caballero & Crescentino, 2020; Doctor, 2019; Ivanov, 2020).

Regarding international issues, Bolsonaro promised to minimize the ideological trends of foreign policy during the presidential campaign. However, he insisted on a strong far-right ideological discourse against the continuity of Brazil's diplomatic traditions. Right after Bolsonaro came into power in 2019, he changed dramatically the independence, the predominant pragmatism, and the moderation that were pillars of Brazil's international insertion (Saraiva, 2020). The Bolsonaroist diplomacy – first led by then foreign minister Ernesto Araújo, who lacked ambassadorial experience and was painted by his critics as an anti-globalist, a conspiracy theorist and a US devotee – emphasized conservative and religiously motivated values in the foreign policy discourse, the animosity towards multilateral institutions, the turn away from South and Latin American partners and China, and a quasi-automatic alliance with Donald Trump's administration. Brazil followed the US foreign policy agenda during Trump's term, and the search for autonomy through the diversification of Brazilian international partnerships (Vigevani & Cepaluni, 2007) that characterized the 13 years of the center-left Worker's Party (PT, its acronym in Portuguese) government (2003-2016) was put aside. Other long-standing traditions of Brazilian foreign policy lost relevance, such as the support of independent development and regional integration. Bolsonaro lacked negotiation skills and insertion in national mainstream politics and business. Bolsonaro – who is an admirer and an apologist of Brazil's military regime (1964-1985) – has tried to respond to threats to Brazil's sovereignty over the Amazon and reaffirmed the decision not to join the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Additional Protocol. When Trump left power in the United States, Brazil faced strong criticism from Joe

Biden's administration in environmental and human rights issues, and Bolsonaro was even more isolated on the global stage. The 2021 resignation of Araújo – who was heavily criticized by agribusiness groups, the military, and the diplomatic circle – as the Foreign Minister was more an “adjustment” than a significant turn in Bolsonaro's foreign policy. Araújo's resignation and the simultaneous dismissal of Defense Minister Fernando Azevedo e Silva were followed by the quitting of the leaders of all the Armed Forces branches. These were indications of a crisis of the Bolsonaro presidency, which was facing growing domestic criticism because of its mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the new Foreign Minister, Carlos Alberto Franco França, took office. In his inaugural speech, França listed “health diplomacy”, the economic modernization, and the “climate urgency” as his foreign policy priorities, as well as multilateralism and universalism. However, few changes were really implemented (Bezerra, 2020; Chagas-Bastos, 2019; Neves, 2021; Prinsloo, 2019; Silva, 2022; Weiffen, 2022).

During three decades as a congressman, the former captain Bolsonaro focused on the defense of the military and issued threats against leftist groups, parties, and people, and never played a relevant role in rounding up votes or drafting bills on very important policy issues. Bolsonaro was a vocal critic of ex-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso's pro-market reform agenda and, during the PT's administrations, of initiatives to investigate the crimes committed by the military dictatorship. At that time, he got closer to a new religious right that was against abortion, as well as women and LGBTQIAP+ rights. In the context of changes in social media and networks – such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter –, Bolsonaro mobilized people's attention and rapidly gathered millions of followers. During the 2018 presidential electoral process, Bolsonaro built a strong platform of supporters, united by interests and values, such as gun lobbyists; opponents of abortion, same-sex marriage, and sex education in schools; conservatives; anti-communists; right Christians; neoliberals; and agribusiness lobbyists. His victory was a sign of South America's “turn to the right”. In Brazil, the conditions of possibility for the change were the people's dissatisfaction with the massive corruption scandal that led to the 2016 impeachment of then president Dilma Rousseff and the imprisonment of ex-president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who had governed Brazil from 2003 to 2010. Bolsonaro's administration came right after the right-wing liberal Michel Temer's government, that temporarily replaced Rousseff after her removal from office. During the 2018 elections, domestic issues dominated political debates, particularly those regarding the economic crisis, corruption, public security, and traditional values and customs, in the context of the end of PT's administration via Rousseff's impeachment, an economic crisis, and the revelation of major corruption scandals by the Lava Jato (“Car Wash”) Operation. Bolsonaro embodied the perspective of Brazilian people who saw the PT governments as a travesty of abject corruption and kleptocracy. He won the first round of the elections, going to the run-off with Lula's replacement, the former mayor of the city of São Paulo Fernando Haddad. PT's widespread rejection pushed voters towards Bolsonaro. The ultra-right message spread social-status fears among those who felt their living standards dropping, such as the middle and upper classes. With a strong anti-PT sentiment, multiple sectors of Brazilian society – such as evangelicals and conservative Catholics, authoritarian-minded members of the military, and the business sector that approved neoliberal economic policies – accused the left of undermining public morality because of corruption and private values, as progressive policies advocated by PT and other leftist parties that defended human rights and supported marginalized racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities were understood as the destruction of traditional family and Christian values. Bolsonaro nostalgically spoke about Brazil's military government, named corruption and bribery as Brazil's main problems, advocated large-scale privatization of state-owned assets, and promised to reduce the size and bureaucracy of the federal government, toughen the migration law, and liberalize gun ownership (Chagas-Bastos, 2019; Coutinho & Hinz, 2020; Ivanov, 2020; Simon & Winter, 2019; Weiffen, 2022).

Some sectors of Brazilian society were represented in Bolsonaro's cabinet. The Evangelical Parliamentary Front – a political interest group of politicians against gender equality, abortion, and LGBTQIAP+ rights – secured strategic positions in Bolsonaro's cabinet, such as the Evangelical pastor Damares Alves, appointed as the Minister of Human Rights, Family and Women. The fight against so-called “gender ideology” and reproductive rights, as well as the Brazilian pro-life and pro-family discourse, has won supporters internationally and brought Brazil in line with other states with similar ideological positions, including the US, Hungary, and Saudi Arabia. There was also a growth of the military role in government institutions, as well as the strengthening of free-market capitalism, a tendency supported by the financial and business sectors and represented by the technocrats around the Economy Minister Paulo Guedes. Bolsonaro's ministerial appointments were mainly anti-globalists, in line with the eccentric and self-promoted conservative philosopher Olavo de Carvalho – that resided in the United States and communicated with his Brazilian audience through social media –, such as Araújo. There were also military men who were early Bolsonaro's supporters and provided him with his ticket partner and vice-president Hamilton Mourão, a retired four-star general, and technocrats that legitimized Bolsonaro's ignorance towards the markets, the Congress, and the public opinion. The then Justice and Public Order Minister Sergio Moro was the federal judge heading the Lava Jato Operation from 2014 to 2018. Although some of Bolsonaro's appointees tried to contain his positions, the president and his sons reinforced a polarized view of society and endorsed moralistic indignation, authoritarian values, and conspiracy theories to mobilize

supporters, portray opponents as enemies, and stimulate cohesion around the conservative values they defend. These political battles mobilize an electorate that saw few concrete advances regarding the rampant unemployment and the stagnant economy and try to disguise Bolsonaro's administrative incapacity, improvisation, and lack of planning beyond his crusade against the left, communism, and the demolition of the Christian principles (Caballero & Crescentino, 2020; Chagas-Bastos, 2019; Coutinho & Hinz, 2020; Ivanov, 2020; Weiffen, 2022).

With limited foreign policy credentials among its key actors, the Bolsonaro administration indicated Araújo as its first Foreign Minister. Araújo was inspired by Carvalho (who turned into an ideological beacon for Bolsonaro and his sons), damaged Itamaraty's (Brazilian Foreign Ministry) image of professionalism and autonomy, and worked as a Bolsonaro's political-ideological shield domestically and internationally. The predominant pragmatism of Brazilian foreign policy was replaced by a heavy ideological attack on "globalism", understood as a moral crusade against communism. Bolsonaro, Araújo and other members of the administration indiscriminately labelled leftist and progressive groups and individuals such as environmental organizations and human rights groups as communists and emphasized the need to limit "cultural Marxism" that allegedly aimed to replace Christian and family values with "foreign" ideas such as sustainability, gender equality, and LGBTQIAP+ rights through plots carried out by international institutions and leftist administrations. Many nationalist members of Bolsonaro's administration claimed to defend Brazil against real or imaginary external or ideological enemies, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and China, an ideological adversary but an important trading partner (Weiffen, 2022).

Bolsonaro's anti-globalist stance was visible in the strong rejection of liberal multilateral institutions and international treaties. He threatened to leave some of them – such as the Paris Climate Accords and the World Health Organization (WHO) –, and left some agreements, such as the UN Global Compact for Migration. Bolsonaro's administration also distanced itself from the Global South, was indifferent towards South-South cooperation forums such as BRICS, disengaged from regional organizations' agendas such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUL, its acronym in Portuguese), denounced some regional institutions – such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL, its acronym in Portuguese) as a "Bolivarian" and socialist regional initiative promoted by PT governments – and withdrew from them, such as UNASUL itself and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, its acronym in Portuguese). Bolsonaro did not show much interest in the Forum for the Progress of South America (PROSUL, its acronym in Portuguese), set up in 2019 under the auspices of Chile and Colombia to replace UNASUL. Bolsonaro aligned with Trump's strategy of putting pressure on Venezuela, initially even supported the idea of a military intervention in the South American state, and played a secondary role in the Lima Group, an informal body created in 2017 to mediate the crisis in Venezuela. Bolsonaro also loosened Brazil's ties with South American partners such as Argentina, other Latin American states, and China, Brazil's main trading partner. Bolsonaro's foreign policy team has prioritized relations with the United States and the Global North, as seen in Brazil's attainment of full membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Temer looked more pragmatic than ideological when he wanted to reinforce cooperation with the organization in the context of the development of OECD's markets almost ten years after the economic setback. However, Bolsonaro reinforced Brazil's ideological connection with the United States and the West in Brazil's attainment of OECD's full membership, while taming relations with BRICS. The prioritization of relations with the Global North was also visible in the signature of the EU-MERCOSUL Trade Agreement, which provides for lower tariffs on imports of cars and auto-parts, clothing, textiles, beverages, and chocolates, but includes a clause with reference to the preservation of the Amazon and respect for the Paris Agreement. The deal between MERCOSUL and the European Union was threatened by European leaders as governmental and societal actors in Europe have demanded putting a stop to Amazon and Pantanal deforestation before proceeding with the deal (Neves, 2021; Prinsloo, 2019; Saraiva & Silva, 2019; Villa & Sundaram, 2021; Weiffen, 2022).

Internationally, Brazil has gone from being a reliable partner to a global pariah due to the burning of the Amazon Forest, the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19, and the emergence of a new virus variant in Brazil. Many conspiracy theories have been present in Bolsonaro's reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. Bolsonaro framed the pandemic as a "communist conspiracy" and created narratives around the terms "Chinese virus" and "Chinese vaccine". Araújo even declared that China and international institutions such as the WHO instrumentalized the pandemic to build a world order with no nations and liberty. In his 2019 and 2020 UN General Assembly speeches, Bolsonaro opted to promote this agenda and showed disbelief toward – and sometimes attempts to undermine – international institutions. Bolsonaro's administration attacked national and international human rights institutions, encouraged the use of more lethal force by the police, and opened protected lands of indigenous tribes to cattle ranches, agriculture, and the timber industry, seen as fundamental for economic growth and poverty alleviation (Silva, 2022; Weiffen, 2022).

The aims of the article are to identify the main factors that have defined Bolsonaro's foreign actions and explain the main changes in Brazil's foreign policy from 2019 to 2022. In line with Casarões & Flemes (2019) and Vidigal (2019), I argue that, although the alignment with the Donald Trump's administration structured the main axes of Bolsonaro's

foreign policy and the ideological discourse in foreign policy has not been abandoned by the Brazilian government during Bolsonaro's term, some adjustments were necessary in sensitive topics such as relations with China and the Venezuelan crisis to adapt to the interests of relevant segments of Brazilian politics. Bolsonaro's foreign policy depends heavily on the outcome of the struggle between the pragmatic economic and military members of his administration on one side, and the religious and conservative ideologists on the other. It shows that domestic interests – particularly the need to please Bolsonaro's political base, which turned Brazil into a violator of indigenous, LGBTQIAP+, and other minorities' rights – are more important than global commitments Brazil has previously assumed.

## 2. Methods

Regarding the methodological considerations of the article, the qualitative approach of categorial content analysis has the purpose of strengthening the knowledge about the forces which have defined Bolsonaro's foreign policy and the changes that occurred in the content of this policy during his term. The consideration of highly cited articles and books about Brazil's foreign policy and Bolsonaro's foreign policy was used strategically to identify trends – particularly regarding the domestic actors who influenced Bolsonaro's foreign policy and the more relevant international actors in the definition of its content –, and research gaps, such as the apparent contradiction in criticizing China and trying to preserve the trade relations with the Asian state. According to Arden et al. (2018), the categorial content analysis may bring a better understanding of present contexts – such as Brazil's foreign policy from 2019 to 2022 –, which gives the conditions for criticism by future researchers.

During the first stage presented by Arden et al. (2018), I chose the search procedures based on the guidance provided by the scholarly literature and elected the main books and articles with high circulation and use in prior analysis from 2019 to 2022. The criteria for searching and constructing the database encompassed the authors' and the publications' names, as well as the citation counts in Google Scholar. The results were cross-checked to assure that all the cited works met the established criteria.

Two elements were used to distribute the chosen information: the ideology and the pragmatism in Jair Bolsonaro's Foreign Policy. The purposes were to identify the main actors who represent the ideological and the pragmatic wings of Bolsonaro's government and its supporters and indicate their strategies to influence the content of Brazilian foreign policy, as well as their limitations.

The discussion was developed through bibliographical research and a qualitative approach of categorial content analysis. The main categories to assign the selected information were based on the most relevant areas and institutions the Brazilian government had to deal with during the considered period: 1) the relations with the United States and Europe; 2) the relations with Latin America; and 3) the relations with other parts of the Global South and multilateral institutions. The aims were to evaluate Brazil's foreign policy during Bolsonaro's rule and identify how the ideological and the pragmatic elements interacted in Brazilian foreign policy decision making to define Brazil's international insertion from 2019 to 2022.

## 3. Results

Bolsonaro's administration is composed of the Armed Forces members, including important political positions in Bolsonaro's and Mourão's offices and the Ministry of Health, such as Health minister Eduardo Pazuello, who managed Brazil's reaction to COVID-19 from 2020 to early 2021; economic and financial technocrats; and the agribusinessmen, who became leaders of the Agriculture Ministry and defined important actions of the Environment Ministry; and the "ideological wing" formed by Carvalho's followers and Neo-Pentecostal people who commanded the Education, Human Rights, and Foreign Affairs Ministries and supported a reactionary agenda of values. Araújo was a part of the "ideological wing" and highlighted that Bolsonaro would free Brazil "through truth", shown not by science but by God, defended positions against the UN and China, which supplies surgical masks and pharmaceutical elements to fabricate vaccines (Milani & Nery, 2021). Furthermore, several diplomats were uncomfortable with changes in the Itamaraty's organizational chart, which subverted old hierarchies and traditional thematic links. The new organization was carried out with no consultation with the Secretary of State. The presidency's direct advisers in foreign policy issues were chosen from the younger generation of diplomats, which was another reason for discomfort among the oldest in their careers (Almeida, 2019). The unprecedented bureaucratic reshuffling also eliminated the participation in the decision-making process of many people who disagreed with the new directives, irrespective of rank or previous experience. The directives included the strengthening of US-Brazil relations and a stronger connection with right-wing presidents in Latin America, for example (Casarões & Fledes, 2019).

The "ideological wing" is more associated with personalism and focuses on doctrines and principles. In foreign policy making, its members prioritize the compatibility of alternatives to the principles advocated over the practical consequences of those principles. Members of the "ideological wing" typically have the support of the most fanatic Bolsonaro's supporters, who have been calling him "myth" since the 2018 presidential campaign. Nevertheless, myths

relate to real-life situations through stories with no objective truths or empirical grounds. The “ideological wing” was the main responsible for the mythical and conspiratorial nature of Bolsonaro’s foreign policy, often detached from the solid bases of history, science, and professional policy recommendations. Most Bolsonaro’s foreign policy decisions lack the professional formulation and implementation and include impoliteness, disrespect for diplomatic procedures, and an apocalyptic rhetoric about international institutions (Magalhães & Thomaz, 2021). Amid later setbacks, the Bolsonaro’s government reveals a permanent tension between pragmatism and ideology in its foreign policy. On several occasions, Bolsonaro joined the ideological group in public statements, especially with his son Eduardo Bolsonaro and Araújo. The president even suggested that Eduardo Bolsonaro – with no experience in a diplomatic career – occupy the position of Brazilian ambassador to the United States, which was criticized by members of the Legislative Power and the Judiciary, and debates on the issue were stalled. However, the intentions of the ideological wing found limitations for actions in the foreign environment, especially in relation to the military and other groups that, to some extent, would be affected by such actions (Saraiva & Silva, 2019).

This became particularly clear in the context of tensions in Venezuela, which provoked different reactions in Brazil: while Araújo expressed support for the interim president of Venezuela Juan Guaidó and harshly criticized the government of Nicolás Maduro, Mourão ruled out the possibility of intervention in the neighboring state and considered that the solution should come from Venezuela itself, including an honorable opportunity for Maduro to leave power. The Brazilian vice president ruled out the possibility of any intervention in Venezuela’s internal affairs not to set precedents for future US interventions in other Latin American states. He signalled that he would maintain political-diplomatic pressure for Venezuela to get back on track of a full democracy. Even so, the alignment with US policy was evident in the use of political-diplomatic pressures coated in the argument of defense of democracy (Vidigal, 2019).

It is necessary to understand more precisely the content of the ideological core of Bolsonaro’s administration. Ultra-right governments such as Bolsonaro’s rule tend to consolidate in their relations with other ultraconservative governments a deep conservative identity, which includes the anti-globalist narrative characterized by a criticism to international normative liberal forums and organizations, seen as conspirators undermining the people’s aspirations because of the alleged risks of instability, disorder, and the elimination of social cohesion; a nationalist defense of sovereignty that tries to preserve national traditions and sees economic losses or social threats as the loss of national identity and status; and the oppositional friend/foe narrative in international issues, often translated in the devotion for leaders who protect their supporters’ traditions, which turns governing into an ongoing campaign against imaginary enemies that threaten the state’s homogeneity, including cosmopolitan citizens that supposedly are unfaithful to the national interests. The hostility attempts to split the population between “us” and “them”. The stereotyped and oversimplified images define boundaries between self and other and shape roles on the national and international stages, giving prevalence to the benign leader’s image as a defender of the people against the enemy images of “out-groups”, understood as threats to the far-right project, such as images of the PT, Venezuela, and non-governmental organizations held by members of Bolsonaro’s administration. In foreign affairs, the far-right neo-patriotic, nationalist, and anti-globalist ideology defies international institutions as a way of battling globalization as a hegemonic order (Guimarães & Silva, 2021; Neves, 2021; Silva, 2022; Wehner, 2022).

Under Bolsonaro’s administration, the conservative identity of the Brazilian leader questions international institutions and proposes the redefinition of the international system under a reactionary anti-cosmopolitanism and an attack against the liberal international order, a project that was sponsored by national elites profiting from it. The project was put in practice in part through the deconstruction of reality, what has been called denialism, which relates to the inversion of real facts and the spread of parallel narratives through internet social media and fake news. In the invented narratives, other state and non-state actors were characterized as threats to national boundaries, family, and life, which legitimized national and international positions from Bolsonaro’s administration (Neves, 2021). The far-right and religious-infused approach adopted by Bolsonaro and many members of his team has been characterized by the explicit rejection of traditional multilateral and regional cooperation schemes, which have been key elements of Brazilian foreign policy for a long time. The reshaping of Brazilian foreign policy under Bolsonaro was based on anti-globalism, anti-Communism, and religious and conservative nationalism (Casarões & Farias, 2021). Although Bolsonaro’s administration ideology and the alignment with the US are not new in Brazilian foreign policy’s content, the methods used to expose these elements were distinct from previous administrations, because the ideological wing of Bolsonaro’s government operates on the premise of destruction and the creation of chaos as a government strategy to keep the hard core of its electoral base cohesive, particularly through Bolsonarist networks of social support, and, in the case of foreign policy issues, defy or abandon principles such as the mediation in regional conflicts, the autonomy regarding the United States’ positions in South America, China and Middle East issues (particularly the Israeli-Palestinian dispute), and the defense of multilateralism (Guimarães & Silva, 2022).

When nationalism is anchored in conservatism, it tends to hold to a concept of nation identified with an idealized past

that should be preserved, discredit the individual capacity for self-government, and promote the mistrust of the democratic model, which is usually seen by the far-right in an ambivalent way: although far-right parties and candidates come into power through free and fair elections, they usually respect the election results as long as they win it, as it happened with Bolsonaro. Institutions directly linked to the democracy maintenance, such as checks and balances, Supreme Courts, and press freedom, are typically undermined. In Bolsonaro's case, as in other far-right governments, a conservative type of nationalist rhetoric – which encompasses the cultivation of a direct connection with “the people” of whom he declares himself the legitimate representative, an exaltation of national symbols, and the view of individual rights as secondary to the national goals – is combined with a more pragmatic neoliberal economic standpoint, which tries to create the stimulus to economic growth by reducing taxes, cutting back regulation on markets, building pro-market institutions, creating conditions for the business environment, supporting fiscal contraction to boost private sector confidence, and encouraging new consumption and investment decisions. Neoliberalism also favors privatization and denationalization. As examples of the neoliberal agenda's implementation by Guedes, one can cite the change in the oil exploration regime applied to Brazil's pre-salt deposits at the request of foreign oil corporations and Bolsonaro's decision not to exercise his veto power over Boeing's incorporation of Embraer, one of the few competitive Brazilian firms in technology sectors. The Embraer-Boeing deal was highly praised, although its first impacts were non-reciprocal transfers of technology for Boeing and the loss of jobs. The deal's cancellation in 2020 left Embraer still trying to overcome the negative results. The concretization of the neoliberal agenda was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was restarted in 2021 with a new round of liberal reforms and the electric power holding company Eletrobras' privatization. To dismiss any criticism that the neoliberal economic policies contradicted the Bolsonaro's conservative nationalism, Guedes stated that the combination of nationalism and the neoliberal agenda was a center-right alliance comprising economic liberals and social conservatives to remove the center-left – seen as responsible for corruption and excessive government spending – from power and downsize the state to enhance the efficiency of Brazil's economy and eliminate incentives to corruption. Bolsonaro's administration supported the removal of barriers to finance capital, including Central Bank's independence, as well as bilateral relationships and agreements rather than multilateral initiatives. Nevertheless, the administration has implemented less reforms than expected despite its promises of liberalizing and modernizing the economy. The precarious management of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unfulfilled perspectives of improvement of the economic activities, and the abandoned opportunities regarding green finance have pressured the Bolsonaro's administration. The pressure was increased by Bolsonaro's sons' involvement in different corruption schemes, a contradiction with his anti-corruption rhetoric. In the context of the failed performance to have better political and economic results, Bolsonaro needed to embrace “Centrão”, an informal and yet powerful center-right coalition that focused on negotiating its support in exchange for positions in ministries and agencies. Although Centrão is a part of what Bolsonaro attacked as “the old politics” in his 2018 campaign, he cooperated considerably with the Centrão (Moehlecke, 2021; Passos & Santana, 2018; Paula, Machado & Cannone, 2021; Pecequilo, 2021; Silva, 2022).

Bolsonaro's anti-globalist foreign policy was received with heavy criticism even from within his own team. Before being sworn in, Mourão brushed off the president son's Eduardo Bolsonaro's positions on aiding an eventual US military operation in Venezuela and transferring the Brazilian diplomatic representation in Israel to Jerusalem. As the break with Brazil's traditional diplomatic positions could risk Brazil's international credibility, Mourão took up the informal role of “parallel foreign minister”, hosted meetings with ambassadors and delegations from China, Palestine, and other Arab states, and visited some of these international actors criticized by the president. Mourão and other pragmatic members of Bolsonaro's administration underlined the economic risks of alienating China, confronting Arab and Islamic states over Jerusalem, threatening to go to war against Venezuela, or leaving environmental agreements that could risk Brazil's exports to European states. The military, represented by Mourão and other high Army officials, allied with economic liberals, such as Guedes, and many agribusiness members – represented by then Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina, whose goal was to boost commodity exports – to limit some ideological wing's members' positions under Carvalho's direct influence, such as Araújo (Casarões & Fledes, 2019).

The pragmatism of some sectors of Bolsonaro's administration explains the maintenance of trade relations with China and the selective cooperation with Latin American states that were not seen as “leftist dictatorships” in trade agreements, such as the EU-MERCOSUL deal. The stereotyped and oversimplified images of the imagined enemies held by many Bolsonaro's administration members did not always prevent the adoption of a pragmatic approach regarding the strategic cooperation with ideological adversaries, when necessary, particularly as a response to the demands of key domestic actors. Among the most pragmatic actors in Bolsonaro's administration, it is important to mention many military men, who saw that Bolsonaro's administration could mark a restoration of their rightful place at the nucleus of power as the guardians of Brazil's long-term interests. They also believed that the Armed Forces had evolved since the 1970s and become more democratic and inserted in the world, seen in Brazil's participation in missions in Haiti. Nevertheless, some issues in which the Brazilian government used to foster articulations that justified Brazil's

participation in peace operations abroad were put aside by Bolsonaro. The harsh statements made by members of his administration to the UN, in addition to budget cuts, have placed Brazil in a context that does not encourage its participation in the largest undertakings in which the Armed Forces used to be involved within the UN scope. Furthermore, the military had often participated in disputes between two main factions: the cultural conservatives, many of them evangelical Christians, who advocate radical changes on several issues, such as a more “anti-globalist” foreign policy, and a more pragmatic group of ministers and officials – most of them were senior members –, more concerned with economic recovery and the preservation of Brazil’s position as a global player. Members of the “pragmatic wing” include Mourão – who pressured the president on China and dismissed Bolsonaro’s tough language against the Asian state – and Augusto Heleno, a retired general who became the Minister of Institutional Security. Sometimes their positions clashed with Bolsonaro’s stances – particularly regarding the US and China in foreign issues –, which made many foreign specialists question whether Bolsonaro’s alignment with the military was conveniently designed to borrow the institution’s popularity and ability to staff the government. Bolsonaro’s allies, including his sons, continued to criticize the pragmatic military wing, which showed that military men could not limit the president’s position in various issues to the extent they had believed possible. The military leadership had never been fully comfortable with Bolsonaro’s style and temperament, but it seems more likely to support the president if he chooses to follow a path for moderation and the strengthening of more pragmatic sectors, particularly those responsible for economic reforms (Campos, 2021; Simon & Winter, 2019).

Agribusiness leaders repeatedly lobbied Bolsonaro to be more accommodating in issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, China, and the environment. A retaliation of Arab states could reduce Brazilian exports of agricultural products. The permanent criticism against China could directly hurt soybean’s and other primary products’ exporters. The same can be said about the Amazon and Pantanal deforestation, which could limit commercial negotiations with European states regarding primary goods. Nevertheless, many businesspeople supported Bolsonaro’s policies – even foreign policy decisions – for different reasons. One possible reason is the emergency income aid disbursed by the government, particularly micro entrepreneurs who received government assistance, although Bolsonaro resisted the enlargement of the assistance’s coverage. Another possible reason is the downturn in foreign direct investment, which led to the reduction of competition for Brazilian producers. In the context of the global value chains restructuring during the COVID-19 pandemic, the elevated costs of having business in Brazil and the crisis of the Brazilian markets, many multinational corporations have ceased operations in the Brazilian territory. This increased the available labor force and decreased costs for domestic companies. However, the companies that left Brazil are parts of industries in which there are not many Brazilian players, and many had high costs regarding imported intermediates. One can cite that Bolsonaro’s administration has deliberately tried to undermine environmental laws, particularly the previous Minister of the Environment, Ricardo Salles, who said in a leaked video of 2020 meeting that the COVID-19 pandemic was a chance to debilitate environmental laws as the media would be concentrated on the coverage of the pandemic. Even though there were serious criticism of the government’s perspective approach towards the environment, farmers who benefit from deforestation and fires to illegally dominate land supported the government’s actions. The fires led some political actors to present a case against Bolsonaro in the International Criminal Court (ICC). Brazil’s actions are morally questionable and reveal the choice of a predatory perspective that harms economic development in the context of the elimination of Brazil’s own resources. Finally, despite Brazil’s sanitary and socioeconomic reality, many businesspeople’s and elites’ political preferences challenged democratic pillars over their partisanship in times of high political polarization (Lima, 2022; Moehlecke, 2021; Pecequilo, 2021; Saraiva, 2020; Simon & Winter, 2019; Vidigal, 2019; Wehner, 2022).

#### **4. Discussion**

##### *4.1 The Relations with the United States and Europe*

According to Bolsonaro and the main members of his foreign policy team, the construction of partnerships to enable Brazil to achieve its national goals should include an alliance with the United States – particularly during Trump’s administration – and the fight against globalism, which also included Israel, Hungary, Italy, and Poland. Araújo claimed that the previous PT governments avoided approximations with the United States, Israel, and what he called other “big technological centers”. Even during the 2018 presidential campaign, Bolsonaro declared he would implement a pro-Trump foreign policy instead of the South-South approach adopted by PT’s administrations. Araújo and Bolsonaro’s most powerful foreign adviser and the leader of Steve Bannon’s far-right political movement in Latin America, Filipe Martins, aimed to develop an alliance between Bolsonaro and Trump based on the shared worldviews by the two presidents, from family values to the defense of sovereignty against international institutions and an aggressive anti-left Latin American agenda. Brazilian foreign policy would really be more connected to Trump than to the United States in the context of the conservative view of the West shared by both presidents, instead of considering more precise geopolitical or economic aspects. Through the repetition of the slogan “Trust back to Brazil”, Bolsonaro as the Brazilian president reiterated that “Brazil has changed and changed for the better”, a statement that is reminiscent of the

underlying message of Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. The slogan's emotional appeal indicates that previous political leaders – particularly leftist leaders – have not represented the needs of the people, and during his presidency Brazil has gained confidence, trust, and respect in the world. The US administration saw Bolsonaro as the "Trump of the tropics" and perceived the Brazilian president not only as an ally against Latin American communism but also as a tool to limit Chinese presence in the region. Bolsonaro was determined to follow Trump's initiatives to rally his base, particularly on social media. For example, Bolsonaro announced that he planned to move the Brazilian Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which did not happen. He announced, together with Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the launching of a Brazilian trade office in Jerusalem, supposedly as part of an effort to gradually move Brazil's embassy there. The event showed his foreign policy team's ignorance of the fragile balance achieved by Brazilian diplomacy in the complex politics of the Middle East, besides his lack of understanding of the extensive trade interests of Brazil's agribusiness sector in Arab states. Arab and Muslim states are responsible for 50 per cent of Brazilian beef and poultry exports. Bolsonaro was forced to reverse his decision on the eve of an official visit to Israel. After visiting Jerusalem's holocaust museum, he insisted that Nazism was a leftist movement, an argument also defended by Araújo (Almeida, 2019; Caballero & Crescentino, 2020; Casarões & Flandes, 2019; Doctor, 2019; Guimarães & Silva, 2021; Hamill-Keays, 2020; Neves, 2021; Pagliarini, 2020; Passos & Santana, 2018; Paula, Machado & Cannone, 2021).

In 2019, the US-Brazil Strategic Partnership Dialogue was created to strengthen the alignment of the Brazilian government with Trump beyond the past economic and strategic considerations. Brazil wanted the US support for its OECD's membership and its elevation as a major non-NATO ally, which would give Brazil the preferential access to the purchase of US military equipment and technology. The United States received Brazil's support on issues such as Iran, Cuba, and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In 2019, Brazil abandoned its developing-state status at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in exchange for the US support for its application to join the OECD, which never happened. Before Bolsonaro's administration, the OECD membership was one of Temer government's bets to promote Brazil's reliability for investments. During Bolsonaro's government, Brazil granted the United States access to its military base at Alcântara, with no scientific cooperation. Concessions such as the elimination of visas and export quotas, and the acceptance of US protectionism proved Brazilian alignment with the US. In exchange, the US only promised to support Brazil's OECD membership, its elevation as a non-NATO special ally, and a bilateral commercial agreement, which were not achieved. Trump proposed a vision of the West based on the recovery of the symbolic past, history, and culture of Western nations, with which Bolsonaro identified. Based on the similarities between the foreign policies of the US and Brazil – the distrust of multilateral arrangements, the rapprochement with Israel and Taiwan, and the condemnation of the Venezuelan political regime, for example – it can be inferred that there was a prior understanding between Trump and Bolsonaro, through their advisors and family members, which made Brazilian foreign policy a forced mirroring of US foreign policy in multiple aspects. Under Bolsonaro, the alignment with the United States was not defined based on the state interests, but the government interests, in a voluntary and unilateral way. Even after Joe Biden's victory over Trump in the 2020 US presidential election, Bolsonaro kept supporting Trump's claims for recounting votes and accused Biden of interfering in the Amazon issues. Brazil delayed the recognition of Biden's victory. A more progressive U.S. foreign policy toward Brazil highlights Bolsonaro's antidemocratic tendencies and focuses on combatting inequality and climate change. In this context, Bolsonaro has replaced his Foreign Minister, but his policies regarding the environment are still under strong internal and foreign attacks. In 2021, the US made clear that a trade deal with Brazil was not possible, as well as the support for non-democratic acts (Casarões & Flandes, 2019; Guimarães & Silva, 2021; Milani & Nery, 2021; Neves, 2021; Pagliarini, 2020; Passos & Santana, 2018; Paula, Machado & Cannone, 2021; Pecequilo, 2021; Vidigal, 2019).

Bolsonaro has referred to the deforestation of the Amazon as a myth and fantasy of global elites to undermine Brazil's sovereignty, including European elites and governments. The promotion of national sovereignty has challenged Brazil's multilateral commitments to global climate goals and inter-regional deals, particularly with the EU and its members. European companies even warned about a possible boycott on Brazilian exports and asked authorities to pressure Bolsonaro because of his environmental policy, which was an obstacle to the ratification of the EU-MERCOSUL commercial agreement. The talks regarding the deal accelerated and ended successfully in 2019, but it was expected that ratification would be difficult since the very beginning of the deal's negotiation in the context of EU protectionism. Concerns regarding the Brazilian environmental policy were a point of leverage to European states to delay ratification, which aim to appease their domestic producers. Although there are true fair traders, there are also governments that use sustainability as a cover for protectionism. Salles' attempt to change the rules of the Amazon Fund, sustained by Germany and Norway since 2008, led both states to suspend 70-million-dollar donations. In that context, Bolsonaro criticized Norway for killing whales in the North Pole and said that the money donated to the Amazon Fund should help ex-German chancellor Angela Merkel reforest Germany (Casarões & Flandes, 2019; Moehlecke, 2021; Pecequilo, 2021; Wehner, 2022).

#### 4.2 *The Relations with Latin America*

Bolsonaro has undermined Brazil's role as a leader of regional integration, previously the basis for the Brazilian project of regional power and a part of Brazil's multilateral architecture of global governance. Brazil withdrew from UNASUL – an institution that was created and advanced under Brazil's leadership – and adopted a follower role when Chile and Colombia articulated PROSUL, based on the priority given to the anti-globalist and nationalist issues by Bolsonaro's administration. The main narrative pictures developed by Bolsonaro's government characterize the left-wing administrations in power in Latin America as communist and globalist threats. Those pictures also made explicit the construction of common enemies between Bolsonaro's and Trump's administrations, with the notable example of Venezuelan immigration to Brazil. In his criticism to the Global Compact for Migration, Bolsonaro said that "receiving undesired Venezuelans" would make the economic and social reality in Brazil's state of Roraima worse, as Trump did in the United States regarding illegal immigrants from Latin American states. Bolsonaro stated, before his election, he would send Venezuelan immigrants to refugee camps. Bolsonaro and Trump argued that the Venezuelan – and also the Cuban – regime was a challenge to democracy and associated leftist politicians with corruption scandals. Venezuela started to be used by Bolsonaro's administration as an example of what could happen to a state in which the left remained in power. In 2019, Trump asked Brazil's government to initiate a resolution against Venezuela at the UN Human Rights Commission, an act that was seen by Brazilian diplomats and specialists as political submission to the United States. Bolsonaro's administration also decided to remove the Venezuelan diplomatic staff from Brasília, an act that was supported by Trump's administration and Brazilian far-right sympathizers. There was an unprecedented break of political convergence which undermined the political efforts to preserve MERCOSUL. Cuba has been classified by members of the Bolsonaro government as a "murderous dictatorship". During the 2018 election, Bolsonaro had already expressed the prospect of canceling cooperation with Cuba under the Mais Médicos (More Doctors) Program. Also in 2018, Cuba announced the withdrawal of the program due to then elected president Bolsonaro's announcement of changes in the terms of cooperation, which would include direct payment to medical professionals made available by Cuba (and not through the Pan American Health Organization, which resulted in the appropriation, by the Cuban government, of most of the resources paid for medical services) and demand for the revalidation of diplomas of Cuban doctors in Brazil. During the 2019 Argentinian elections, Bolsonaro attacked the left-wing candidate, Alberto Fernandez, and declared its support to the former president Mauricio Macri, who had neoliberal preferences, although not conservative in customs. Guedes even said that Brazil would leave MERCOSUL if Fernandez won the election. Brazil did not leave MERCOSUL, but Bolsonaro never complimented Fernandez for his victory. Shortly after the confirmation of his victory, Fernandez defended Lula's freedom, which was classified as an "affront to Brazilian democracy" by Bolsonaro, who also claimed that Argentina "chose badly" its president (Guimarães & Silva, 2021; Neves, 2021; Saraiva, 2020; Saraiva & Silva, 2019; Wehner, 2022).

Differently from previous governments, Brazil under Bolsonaro's rule did not consider Latin America a strong priority. Araújo's inauguration speech as Foreign Minister did not mention Latin America and served as a milestone to show the nationalist and conservative turn for the Brazilian foreign policy, particularly towards South and Latin America. Araújo declared that the Bolsonaro's government did not intend to abandon the concept of South America but wanted it to be characterized by "economic openness" and democracy. Brazil lost its main role in regional institutions when it left UNASUL in 2019 and did not assume a protagonist role in the creation of PROSUL. Unlike the treaty-based UNASUL, PROSUL was founded by the Santiago Declaration and is characterized by a flexible nature and a vague institutionalization. PROSUL only welcomes South American democracies and sets six working groups: infrastructure, energy, health, defense, security and fighting crime, and disasters. Nevertheless, it is still unclear whether PROSUL will keep or overhaul the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA, its acronym in Portuguese), created in 2000 and managed by UNASUL between 2008 and 2020. CELAC was also neglected, as well as the Lima Group, which was not even close to solving the Venezuelan crisis. The lack of action of South and Latin American institutions gave a renewed relevance to the Organization of American States (OAS), an institution that includes the United States in the solution of regional problems in the Americas. The anti-integration movement regarding South American regionalism and the mistrust in regional initiatives – supported by multiple sectors of the Brazilian entrepreneurial sector – made explicit the dissatisfaction about MERCOSUL, pointing that the most convenient situation would be its simplification from a customs union to a free trade area, and the possibility of advancing new bilateral commercial deals with other states, which would lead to weaker political cooperation and more flexible regional legislation. Araújo argued that the concepts of multilateralism, intergovernmentalism, global governance, and universal values only disguise regional blocs – as well as the UN – push for supranationalism and world government at the expense of national sovereignty. Nevertheless, the intergovernmental nature of MERCOSUL and UNASUL, which apply consensus-based decision-making, does not correspond to Araújo's argument (Lima, 2022; Magalhães & Thomaz, 2021; Neves, 2021; Silva, 2022).

#### *4.3 The Relations with Other Parts of the Global South and Multilateral Institutions*

Although members of Bolsonaro's administration perceived China as one of Brazil's most relevant ideological enemies that wanted to dominate fundamental sectors of Brazilian economy, China is Brazil's most important commercial partner and consumes most of Brazil's agricultural and mining exports. During the presidential campaign, Bolsonaro visited Taiwan, which violated the principle of "One China", and his critique of China's investment – particularly in Brazil's mining industry, and more especially the niobium sector – emphasized a supposed threat to Brazil's economic sovereignty, which created a great amount of support from the Brazilian population at the first moment. Under Bolsonaro's administration, Araújo said that Brazil would not "sell its soul" to maintain soybean and iron ore exports. The Brazilian government criticized China in terms of the Chinese industry protectionism and its unfair competition practices, such as dumping, low salaries, and weak labor and environmental legislation, which curb Brazilian industrial development. There was also the fear of Chinese rule of Brazilian key infrastructure and natural resources and the submission to Chinese investments in agriculture, energy, and mining, as well as the desire for a diplomatic rapprochement with the United States, the anticommunist hostility towards China's administration, and the need to seek out a Christian heritage in foreign policy issues, which is based on very different values and political system from China. Nevertheless, there were more moderate views from other groups in the administration, particularly senior military officers in the ministerial cabinet and state agencies. For example, Mourão was as the key player for the Brazilian groups searching for a pragmatic relationship with China. He highlighted the relevance of the Chinese market and investments, and that Brazil should not take sides in the trade war between China and the United States. Moderation also came from economic technocrats, such as Guedes, who saw that religious and nationalist views often create trouble with Brazil's trade partners, such as China and the Arab League, and understood that Chinese investments were a key opportunity for the Brazilian public-private partnerships to overcome the infrastructure bottlenecks. Despite the strong influence of anti-globalist members of the Brazilian government, some pragmatic sectors of Bolsonaro's administration have emphasized that China is a very important investor and business is at the core of the relationship between Brazil and China. Although previous administrations were more likely to discuss multilateral engagements and the South-South cooperation, Bolsonaro preferred bilateral relationships, including with China. More precisely, whilst Brazil's and China's administrations mention formally the states' friendship, Bolsonaro showed in some moments his preference for a personal relationship with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Despite the various agreements on infrastructure development and agricultural trade with Chinese companies, Bolsonaro did not achieve any relevant deals on economic and technological cooperation with China (Guimarães & Silva, 2021; Hamill-Keays, 2020; Santoro, 2020; Sawicka, 2020; Villa & Sundaram, 2021; Walt, 2019; Zheng, 2020).

Although Mourão travelled to China in 2019 to ameliorate the relations between the two states, he backtracked on his position on Bolsonaro's personal request under the influence of the ideological wing of Brazilian government. The aggressiveness against China endangered the Brazilian farmers' support to Bolsonaro's administration in its first moment. The turning point in Bolsonaro's position towards China came from the Chinese's support to Bolsonaro's administration during the 2019 Amazon fires crisis based on the principle of national sovereignty. Brazil happens to be in possession of critical global resources in the Amazon, and the rainforest destruction could harm many other states. In that situation, Brazil came under political and diplomatic attack from leaders of many states, mainly the French President Emmanuel Macron. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro's supporters and members of his administration accused China of creating the COVID-19 virus in state laboratories to use it against Western states. Bolsonaro reproduced Trump's stance on the issue, which became more relevant than any trade consideration. The notion of Brazil as a "Western state" came from a redefinition of the concept as a faithful US ally that considered the opposition to globalism; the Christian faith; the values of God, the family, and freedom; the reverence for a mythical past; and the defense of Brazilian national symbols. China was understood as a liberal world order's challenger, connected with "cultural Marxism" and "communism" (Guimarães & Silva, 2021; Santoro, 2020; Sawicka, 2020; Walt, 2019).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bolsonaro expressed ignorance and disdain for scientific activity, disseminated fake news related to the pandemic, and ignored or mocked recommendations of social distancing. In addition to contradicting and forcing the resignation of Health Ministers during the pandemic, Bolsonaro criticized governors and mayors who took measures to mitigate the health crisis and only acted after the State of São Paulo, led by governor João Dória, initiated the acquisition of vaccines in partnership with China's SINOVAC. As a matter of public health, the COVID-19 pandemic was instrumentalized to mobilize conservatives against China and vaccines. The situation became more serious internationally, given the centrality of China in the production of medical supplies and the support of the Brazilian foreign trade agenda. Araújo called the COVID-19 virus the "comunavirus" on his blog and claimed that China could take advantage of the virus to expand its "globalist project". The president's son, Eduardo Bolsonaro, published mixed messages against China, in an incident contested by the Chinese embassy in Brazil and exacerbated by a clumsy note from Itamaraty. The president's son created another crisis with China in 2020 when he suggested that

China was spying through the 5G technology. The then Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub made an irony related to China in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was dismissed by the Chinese embassy as “racist”. The denialism surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has its origins in extreme right-wing leaders based on an anti-globalist ideology, synthesized in the criticism against China and international organizations such as the WHO (Pecequilo, 2021; Silva, 2022).

The anti-globalist narrative of members of Bolsonaro’s cabinet – particularly Martins, Eduardo Bolsonaro and Araújo – became clear before Bolsonaro’s inauguration, when Araújo condemned the Global Compact for Migration for its intervention on each state’s freedom to deliberate internally regarding migration issues. The anti-globalist rhetoric was also present in his speech as Brazilian Foreign Minister at the 2019 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), in which he said that Brazil’s image was damaged because the state was pursuing fair and correct policies, and the UN was spreading fake news about Brazil, particularly regarding the Amazon, instead of criticizing Venezuela for its internal situation. Martins argued that the dilemma of global politics was the struggle between global governance, which aimed to eliminate national states, and liberal sovereign and independent democracies, which legislated for their citizens and respected their neighbors. Araújo emphasized that Brazil was fighting against a “supposed” multilateralism based on an unequal power distribution. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bolsonaro and Brazilian diplomats used anti-globalist arguments to criticize the WHO while other states – except Hungary and the United States – supported the international organization. The Bolsonaro’s administration gave erratic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic against WHO’s orientations. Backed by many members of Neo-Evangelical churches and the military, the Bolsonaro’s administration has promoted scientific denial, ignored health recommendations, and supported the early use of ineffective drugs against the disease, such as chloroquine. The Brazilian government insisted on a dichotomy between economy and health and attempted to generate herd immunity through contagion. The absence of coordination at the federal level has resulted in conflicts between the national government and the states’ and cities’ authorities regarding vaccination, when local leaders started to vaccinate people despite Bolsonaro’s criticism. Furthermore, the prioritization of the economy over controlling the virus’ dissemination was proved wrong, and the economic crisis has persisted (Guimarães & Silva, 2021; Jesus, 2017; Kamlot & Jesus, 2020; Milani & Nery, 2021; Moehlecke, 2021).

Internationally, Brazil did not support India’s proposal, supported by South Africa, made in 2020 at the WTO, to temporarily break intellectual property rights on products related to the pandemic, which has created a breach in Brazil’s regional and multilateral health diplomacy when the state abandoned its long-standing position in favor of patent flexibility. The Bolsonaro’s decision was to support the position of the US, Europe, and Japan, making the Indian proposal lose strength. By politically distancing itself from the BRICS group, especially members such as India and China, Brazil has experienced isolation in the vaccine diplomacy and has faced difficulties in supplying inputs. This isolationist policy may have broader implications for Brazilian foreign trade, such as the political distancing of important buyers, such as China; export problems resulting from the lack of sanitary control; and the isolation in multilateral trade defense articulations (Silva, 2022). The Bolsonaro’s administration only joined the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), a multilateral instrument for access to vaccines, after strong internal pressure. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil was the target of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for the protection of the Yanomami and Ye’kwana indigenous peoples threatened by the rapid increase of cases, aggravated by the presence of miners in indigenous territories and the violence perpetrated by the miners themselves and illegal loggers. The COVID-19 pandemic also caused the collapse of Brazil’s national public healthcare system, the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde, SUS), characterized by limits to access to hospital beds, the lack of supplies and drugs, and exhausted healthcare professionals. The fiscal policies of austerity – which resulted in a strategy of overcoming the pandemic with minimal regulation and costs – aggravated the situation and brought an expressive increase of poverty and hunger in Brazil (Milani & Nery, 2021).

Bolsonaro also thinks that human rights benefit mostly criminals in general and openly defends torture. The domestic resistance to his human rights’ setbacks were partially or entirely blocked by the Judiciary, the public defender, and Congress because of the activism by civil society organizations. Among these initiatives, one can cite the creation of a government unit to control civil society, the qualified immunity for police officers, the extinction of participatory public policy councils, the removal of National Indian Foundation (FUNAI, its acronym in Portuguese)’s attribution on indigenous land demarcations, and the weakening of the National Mechanism for the Prevention and Combatting of Torture (NMPCT), demanded by the UN Optional Protocol to the Prevention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Press freedom and freedom of expression were challenged many times by Bolsonaro’s administration, which faced strong opposition from sectors of the civil society. Nevertheless, initiatives to block setbacks in Brazilian foreign policy regarding human rights have been less effective in the context of low social participation and monitoring in foreign policy making and relative bureaucratic isolation. Bolsonaro turned foreign policy into a catalyst for a conservative anti-human rights agenda. For example, in 2019, Brazilian diplomats were

instructed to use of the idea of biological sex instead of gender in the international institutions in which Brazil participates. Bolsonaro also announced the reduction of 90% of occupational safety internal norms, which had international consequences as Brazil is a member of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and has ratified most of the deals related to labor issues. In 2020, Brazil cosponsored the Geneva Consensus Declaration, which took the form of an international anti-abortion declaration also supported by the United States under the Trump administration, Egypt, Indonesia, Hungary, and Uganda. In 2021, before the UN Human Rights Council, Araújo criticized global measures to fight COVID-19 drawing a simplistic dichotomy between health and freedom and condemning what he called “lockdowns of the human spirit”. Bolsonaro’s administration also censored books and films, an act which disrespects conventions ratified by Brazil. These actions aim to please Bolsonaro’s most conservative electorate that shares the anti-human rights positions, mainly evangelical conservative organizations at the expense of progressive human rights institutions (Lima, 2022; Monte & Hernandez, 2021).

Regarding security issues, Bolsonaro’s administration did not implement relevant shifts in fundamental areas, such as Brazilian nuclear diplomacy. After Bolsonaro took office with a renewed Congress, there has been no concrete action toward the voting on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) text. Brazil did not sign the 1997 International Atomic Energy Agency Model Additional Protocol due to its intrusive nature, the sovereignty relativization, and the protection of technological and strategic information related to the Brazilian nuclear propulsion submarine program (Guimarães & Silva, 2022).

#### 4.4 Final Considerations

The explanation for Bolsonaro’s success during the 2018 elections can be found in the long-standing structural features of Brazilian society and the political and economic crises that framed the run-up to the election. The corruption scandals and the Rousseff’s impeachment crisis weakened popular trust in the traditional political class. Ordinary citizens were outraged with the establishment politicians, and the perception of Bolsonaro’s profile and positions – the “Tropical Trump” – was an internationally acceptable option that helped consolidate his victory (Doctor, 2019). Brazil’s turn to the right was stimulated by oligarchic elites and the strengthening of the Armed Forces and the Church as symbols of security and morality was represented in the slogan “Brazil above everything, God above all” (Pecequillo, 2021).

The Temer and Bolsonaro administrations demonstrated the strength of economic liberalism in one of its shallowest versions: the pursuit of economic growth – not development – through pension reform, deregulation of work, reduction of tariffs, and the cut of funds in areas such as higher education, for example. The liberal economic orientation was reflected, in foreign policy issues, in the Brazilian rapprochement with the US, the understanding of MERCOSUL as a free trade area, the emptying of the South American political-strategic integration and, in the Bolsonaro’s case, the distrust in relation to China. Despite the pragmatism revealed by specific members and supporters of the Bolsonaro government, the alignment with no reciprocity reveals how the Brazilian president superficially assimilated the Trump administration’s directives – trade and technology war with China, dialogue with Taiwan, harmony with Israel, and systematic opposition to Maduro –, with no proper understanding of the United States’ reasons and their inadequacy for Brazil. Trump and Bolsonaro have brought about simplified images of friend and foe and undermined their states’ reputations internationally. Furthermore, Bolsonaro administration’s rhetorical moves made Brazil’s rejection of a South-South strategy both meaningless and dangerous, which is compatible with the pillars of the most conservative members of the coalition that supports Bolsonaro’s government, with a new high level of the personalization of politics regarding the alignment with the US for benefits and changes in historical foreign policy positions. Nevertheless, the biggest bets of Bolsonaro’s administration – the US-Brazil alliance, the OECD, and the EU-MERCOSUL deal – were disappointing (Pecequillo, 2021; Vidigal, 2019; Villa & Sundaram, 2021; Wehner, 2022).

In 2021, as new presidential elections were closer, Bolsonaro’s permanent electoral campaign agenda became clear, as he joined plenty of motorcycle rallies across Brazil and boosted his narrative of questioning Brazilian electoral process, alleging it was prone to frauds. The government’s conservative nationalist rhetoric appealed to national values and symbols, such as the colors of the Brazilian flag, national sovereignty, and the armed forces, and the persistence on the idea that Bolsonaro was the only legitimate representative of the people, which is strengthened by dissociating Bolsonaro from other politicians seen as corrupt with the use of direct communication with his voters through the social media. Nevertheless, Brazil adopted a predatory model of development, which negatively affects the perception of Brazil’s global role because it is seen as a peripheral state resulting from the domestic oligarchic pact among members of the national political elites connected with Bolsonaro (Paula, Machado & Cannone, 2021; Pecequillo, 2021).

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