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Brazil's viewpoints on international organizations: Political aspects

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Abstract

Recent (geo)political tensions, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of nationalism worldwide have brought to the forefront processes of (de)globalization both in social, political, and economic terms. In this context, we place questions: How have Brazil's views on international organizations changed over the years and why does it matter when it comes to understanding the country's recent contribution to the processes of (de)globalization? To answer the aforementioned questions, this article discusses some of Brazil's main points of view on international organizations (IOs) from a historical perspective. Therefore, we aim to analyze the criticism and political positions of Brazil regarding the most relevant IOs over time, from the League of Nations to the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. Additionally, this paper addresses Jair Bolsonaro's (de)globalization positions, especially in view of his peculiar foreign policy oriented towards the contestation of the system. As a concluding point, we provide sufficient evidence on Bolsonaro's political inclination towards processes of (de)globalization based on his contempt for the so-called 'globalism', as well as his nationalistic rhetoric.

Keywords

International organizations, Brazil, global governance, globalism, Brazilian foreign policy.

JEL: F02, F50, F55, O19.

Introduction

Politically, socially and economically, globalization[1] has diminished the importance of national states as decision-makers, even in relation to matters that were traditionally under their domestic jurisdiction. In a broader sense, globalization may also be considered as a process in which traditional barriers between national states become blurred as a result of technological advancements and intense exchange of information between people around the world. Notwithstanding this, problems such as terrorism, environmental degradation, epidemics, global warming and the interconnectedness of financial markets forced states around the world to change their political approach to these issues, once they ignore the confines of territorially defined political entities. However, it is important to note that the principle of 'sovereignty' introduced by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 (which is considered the origin of the modern system of international states) still remains the basis of international relations to this day.

Be it as it may, due to globalization, states in most cases are no longer able to plan, control and implement adequate solutions to complex issues with economic, social and environmental consequences, as demonstrated by their lack or preparedness in the face of the financial crisis of 2008, the recent migrant crisis in Europe, the implementation of the Paris Agreements, and the latest COVID-19 crisis. In view of this scenario, the globalizing character of today's world compelled many state leaders to understand their difficult position when it comes to the full exercise of their rights to sovereignty, which leads either to compliance with these new realities or even to a rebellious attitude towards it. This paper claims that Brazil's most recent example corresponds to the second group, with Bolsonaro's government working to undermine some specific trends of globalization, as well as to change some of Brazil's most traditional views on IOs and multilateralism.

At the same time, due to Jair Bolsonaro's negative view on the so-called "globalism"[2] (one of the alleged consequences of globalization), Brazil, as this paper aims to demonstrate, has become one of many countries that now feel threatened by an "obscure cosmopolitan agenda," presenting itself as a bulwark of the concept of 'sovereignty' in world affairs. Meanwhile, in view of the current global economic crisis, one of the triggering factors of which is the special military operation launched by Russia in Ukraine, new processes of deglobalization can be witnessed in the international arena, such as attempts to isolate Moscow both economically and financially from the system. In this regard, Bolsonaro also decided to act in the opposite direction to most Western

[1] Globalization as a political, economic and social phenomenon has been widely analyzed by various branches of social sciences. Nevertheless, there is no widely accepted definition for the term yet. Most of the media and the population in general tend to favor the economists' view of the process, interpreting globalization as a fundamental extension and deepening of economic integration between countries (Stiglitz, 2003).

[2] A term frequently related to outside forces that tend to undermine the values and traditions of national communities propelled by an international free-flow of ideas, as will be further discussed in this paper.

leaders, refraining from condemning Moscow's actions, as well as attempting to build closer relations with Russia.

1. Different points of view on IOs

After the creation of the United Nations in 1945, numerous international organizations (IOs) emerged on the world stage, representing different forms, aims and principles. The post-war order was based on the principle of "multilateralism" and the "sovereign equality" of states, with countries working together through international organizations in a rules-based cooperative framework in order to mitigate the effects of power politics, which ultimately caused two great conflicts during the first half of the 20th century.

However, during the last decades following World War II, not only did IOs proliferate, but many specialists and scholars began to raise questions related to their actual influence on international affairs. Discussions about whether these numerous IOs changed the essential nature of world politics attracted the attention of political practitioners and non-practitioners alike, and some scholars argued, for instance, that a proper science dealing with international relations must look at the role of international organizations when trying to determine outcomes in world politics (Keohane, 1971). Others even made the case for the inclusion of IOs and international law as obligatory subjects in a well-rounded international studies program (Cordier, 1967).

Although conceding that "states have been and remain the most important actors in world affairs, acting both directly and through intergovernmental organizations to which states, and only states, belong" (Keohane, 1971, p. 344), academics in IR (especially neoliberals) started to consider actors other than states as effective players in the world arena, widening the study of IR with the inclusion of multi-national corporations (MNCs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), IOs and others in their scope of analysis. Additionally, these scholars argue that norms and values shared by states work as a precondition for the establishment of IOs and, once established, these organizations strengthen the interactions between its members, thus representing not only state-based but also value-based institutions, exercising their expertise and political authority to affect the practices of states and influence their behavior (Keohane, 1984; Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). Another point made in favor of IOs is that they provide not only opportunities for member-states to communicate their problems and needs, but also the incentives and obligations to do so, helping to promote policy interactions on a regular basis (Jacobson, 1984).

On the other hand, realists and neo-realists consider the study of IOs as being of secondary importance, limiting their enquiries to state power and emphasizing that states are the primary actors and the sources of power in world politics. For them, the language of "power politics" is the only one that helps us explain state action once states control and define the nature of the system in a way that IOs do not. Realists would also suggest that powerful states only abide by constraining IOs rules when

it suits them or, as Waltz (2000, 27) puts it, "most international law is obeyed most of the time, but strong states bend or break laws when they choose to." Thus, realists affirm that despite the rhetoric of multilateralism so often coming from the mouths of state-leaders, the same old disputes for power and influence between states still exist, with the difference that now they are somewhat hidden behind organizational façades provided by the IOs. These institutions are, according to some, "a reflection of the distribution of power in the world … based on the self-interest calculations of the Great Powers" and having "no independent effect on state behavior" (Mearsheimer, 1995, 7).

Brazil´s position regarding international organizations in some respect corresponds to both of these two points of view presented before. On the one hand, the country is an active member of the main institutions of Global Governance, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the WTO, and others. On the other hand, Brazil also criticizes some features related to those institutions, especially in matters dealing with representativeness and power [re]distribution (as in the case of the Security Council), and the Western exclusivity in chief positions at organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF.

The way Brazil positions itself in order to have a say in the reforming (or rearranging) of those IOs is varied, ranging from small political groups, such as the G4, to more elaborated and diversified ones, as BRICS and the G20. In both the G4 and BRICS, countries dissatisfied with their status in the international system join efforts in order to have better chances of changing the mechanisms according to which they´ve not been so well represented. The main points put forward by those initiatives and Brazil´s challenges lying ahead in the future are the subjects of analyses in the following sections of this paper.

2. From the Concert to the League: Brazil's early dreams of recognition

Following the Napoleonic Wars (1801–1815) in the 19th century, there was an urgent need to restructure Europe, with countries in the continent engaging in a number of congresses, conventions and treaties, building a system that afterwards became known as the "Concert of Europe." The Concert adopted an agreement according to which peaceful evolutions within the existing order were preferable to [revolutionary] alternatives to it; the preservation of the system was more important than any isolated dispute that could arise within it; and differences should be resolved by consultation, not war (Kissinger, 2015). The period between 1815 and the turn of the century was one of the most peaceful in modern Europe, and the decades immediately following the Congress of Vienna were characterized by a political balance between legitimacy and power. Since then, significant developments have taken place in the history of world politics, including the first appearance of IOs created in the 19th century to ensure cooperation between states (mostly European powers).

At that time, technical issues also became a focus of discussion, bringing about the formation of organizations such as the International Telegraph Union (1865),[3] the Universal Postal Union (1874), the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (1875), the Union for Protection of Intellectual Property (1883), etc. Brazil, in its turn, did participate in some of these organizations. In 1875 the country was one of the original members of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, whereas in 1877 Brazil joined the International Telegraph Union and the Universal Postal Union.

Be it as it may, the subtle balance achieved by the Concert of Europe began to erode in the mid-19th century under the impact of the rise of nationalism, the revolutions of 1848 and the Crimean War. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, that "Concert system," built on the balance of power, was weakened by inherent dynamics in the politics of the Great Power and egoistical maneuvers that ended up driving the world towards the first great war (Kissinger, 2015).

Moving further in time, the end of World War I (1914–1918) marked the creation of the very first "universal organization",[4] the League of Nations, whose political aim was to maintain peace and stability worldwide. Its inception embodied US President Wilson´s suggestion about the necessity of a "general association of nations… for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."

Wilson argued for the establishment of the League of Nations that would act as a check on the power of aggressive and militaristic states. The US president believed that an organization that represented the interests of all states was able to legitimize a universal commitment to collective security, that is, states would work together to ensure the maintenance of peaceful international relations. The point being that the creation of an IO based on the strict observance of international law would serve as a "guarantor" of peace and as an instrument to help avoid new wars in the future.

By that time, Brazil was aspiring to become a permanent member of the "*high table*" of international politics, represented by the League of Nations Council. The Council was a coalition of four permanent members: France, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom, whose most important task was to settle international disputes, meeting three times a year and reporting to all members of the League about its activities.[5] Brazil was one the first four non-permanent members of the Council, alongside Belgium, Greece and Spain (League of Nations Covenant, 1920), but this place seemed not to be enough for the country' leaders at that time.

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[3] In 1932, the organization´s name was changed to International Telecommunication Union.

[4] By the Versailles Peace Conference of April 1919.

[5] Germany joined it in 1926, but left in 1935. In September 1934, the Soviet Union entered the League of Nations. Up to 10 non-permanent Council members were also elected by the Assembly for a three-year period. https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/36BC4F83BD9E4443C1257AF3004FC0AE/%24file/Historical_overview_of_the_League_of_Nations.pdf

In the early 1920s, during the government of Artur Bernardes (1922–1926), the priority of Brazilian foreign policy was to obtain a permanent seat at the Council in order to elevate the country´s international status to a level equivalent to that of the European Great Powers, regardless of the disparities in political weight and influence between Brazil and those countries (Garcia, 2006). This early Brazilian dream of recognition became a feature that would continue to resonate in its political history, reappearing during Lula´s (2003–2010) and Dilma's (2011–2016) years in government.

3. The UN and Brazil's continued aspiration to take a permanent seat at the "high table" of world politics

After the end of World War II, fifty countries gathered in San Francisco approved what became the Charter of the United Nations (UN), considered at that time as an improvement of the previous (and failed) League of Nations, intended to re-establish cooperation and peaceful relations between states. With its universal membership, the UN has underlined its commitment to the idea of multilateralism, represented, for instance, by a mechanism that allowed every member state to have an equally weighted vote in the General Assembly (GA) when deliberating about issues of international relevance but lacking a binding and/or coercive power upon the states.[6]

Apart from the GA, the most powerful organ of the UN is the Security Council, endowed with the "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" (UN Charter, 1948)[7], with Russia (heir to the Soviet Union), France, the United States, the United Kingdom and China having permanent seats and the right to veto at the mechanism. In relation to the Security Council, some argue that the differentiated *status* of the 5 permanent members *vis-à-vis* other members seems to confirm the thesis that decision-making in the UN resides within the hands of a few privileged states.

During Luis Inácio (Lula) da Silva´s government (2003–2010), for instance, one of the main traits of Brazilian foreign policy was obtaining of a permanent seat at the Security Council (Barbosa, 2008), something that motivated Brazil's articulation with Japan, Germany and India for the formation of the G4, a coalition of countries that pressed for reforms of the institution. At its first official meeting, on February 2011, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the G4 countries stated that:

As democracies with shared political values including respect for the rule of law, respect for human rights and a commitment to multilateralism, the G4 countries hold a number of common positions on the major contemporary challenges to international peace and security (G4, 2011).

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[6] http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/

[7] This reflects, according to realists' critique, the unequal power relations that still exist between states in the international system.

At the same time, the G4 countries reaffirmed their willingness to take on major responsibilities in world affairs, proposing to be included as permanent members of an expanded Security Council. Since the first Ministerial Meeting in 2011, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Heads of State of the four countries have met a number of times at the sidelines of UN assemblies.

Table 1. G4 Meetings

Meetings	Date
G4 Meeting of the Foreign Ministers — New York	September 21, 2017
G4 Meeting of the Foreign Ministers — New York	September 21, 2016
G4 Ministerial Meeting — New York	July 11, 2016
G4 Meeting of the Leaders — New York	September 26, 2015
G4 Ministerial Meeting — New York	July 04, 2014
G4 Ministerial Meeting — New York	September 25, 2012
G4 Ministerial Meeting — New York	September 25, 2012
G4 Ministerial Meeting — New York	February 11, 2011

Source: http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/en/component/tags/tag/g4-brazil-germany-india-and-japan

According to Aloysio Nunes, former Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the G4 group aimed to reform the Security Council, so that it would become more representative, once "the composition [of the Council] has remained the same since

Table 2. UNSC number of members *vis-à-vis* UN total members

YEAR	UN members	UNSC seats	% OF UNSC seats/UN members
1945	51	11	21%
1965	117	15	13%
2019	193	15	8%

Source: https://www.un.org/en/sections/member-states/growth-united-nations-membership-1945-present/index.html#1960s

the immediate post-war and the world has changed a lot",[8] while the percentage of UNSC seats compared to the UN total seats has steadily decreased over time (Table 2).

Previous Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs Jose Serra, who served from 2016 to 2017, also pointed to the changes that had occurred in the international system

[8] https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/eleicoes/2018/noticias/bbc/2018/09/27/bolsonaro-nao-traria-retrocesso-a-relacoes-internacionais-diz-ministro.htm?fbclid=IwAR3_uZDRycttJv5PEP-hlCtDizKC4lSGmkypibc3L0OPI_AWgs5dY3n-YKkg

since the end of the World War II, while the UNSC kept its composition intact. Serra, for instance, commented that:

The UN Security Council still has a core membership that reflects the world of 1945… the incorporation of new permanent members, could be beneficial to all. It could break the current stalemate that prevents us to solve many of the problems and crises that continue to threaten international peace (Serra, 2016).

Be it as it may, Brazil's attempt to take a permanent seat at the "high table" of World Politics is reflective of the country's early dream of recognition that dates back to the 1920s.

4. Finance and trade: Contestation *versus* accommodation

The so-called Bretton Woods system refers to an array of economic institutions established after the 1944 conference in New Hampshire to help govern the global economy and nowadays comprises both the World Bank (initially named the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Currently, the IMF is composed by 188 member countries that contribute to the organization by making available part of their international reserves. Thus, whenever necessary, the Fund can allocate those resources, by means of loans, to help countries facing deficits at their balance of payments, provided that they fulfill certain requirements/criteria established by the IMF itself in order to reorganize their economy.

Countries with the biggest number of quotas at the IMF are also the ones with the biggest voting shares and, therefore, capable of influencing the institutions' decisions and operations. The country with the biggest voting power at the IMF at the moment is the US, with 16.51% of the total vote's share. The World Bank, in turn, has an organizational structure that also resembles that of the IMF, where voting power is distributed according to each country's participation as a guarantor of the Bank's capital. Currently, the countries with the biggest voting power are: the United States (with veto power in relation to any of the Bank's decisions), Japan, China, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and India. That being said, criticisms of these two institutions usually regard the way in which they are used by industrialized countries to control poorer ones in the so-called "Global South," forcing them to adopt certain economic and social policies in return for financial assistance and for obtaining loans.

The "Global South," in its turn, corresponds to the peripheral (and/or semi-peripheral) regions or countries in the world capitalist economy, formerly known as the Third World during the Cold War, and which are loosely associated with Latin America, Africa and even some parts of Asia. The term also represents a metaphor for social exploitation and economic exclusion experienced throughout their historical relationship with the core capitalist nations of Europe and North America, known as the "Global North."

In fact, the rise of the "Global South" during the mid-2000s demonstrated a shift in global power towards emerging economies (Woods, 2013), with previously neglected countries starting to criticize the current state of affairs, as well as global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, for representing the interests of the developed countries of the North. In this sense, both the World Bank and the IMF are seen as an international consortium of financial institutions intended to persuade less-powerful countries into opening their economies peacefully while at the same time accepting the interference of foreign states in their internal affairs (Cooper, 1996).

Nevertheless, after the financial crisis of 2008, in the context of the first formal BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) group summit held in Yekaterinburg (Russia) in 2009, the four emerging economies "quickly laid out an ambitious set of plans" (Labbé, 2018) regarding the creation of an investment bank to rival the World Bank and the IMF. In their first Joint Statement, the BRIC group affirmed their commitment:

To advance the reform of international financial institutions, so as to reflect changes in the global economy. The emerging and developing economies must have greater voice and representation in international financial institutions, whose heads and executives should be appointed through an open, transparent, and merit-based selection process.[9]

Since then, although receiving little attention from Western media by the time of its inception, the group subsequently came to be regarded as "an unwelcome challenge to the established world order as defined by the US-dominated UN Security Council, the IMF and the World Bank."[10] Some experts argued that BRICS seeks "to change the hierarchy in the [international] system to obtain privileges that have so far been only enjoyed by the developed countries in the West" (Sergunin, 2021, 89). Notwithstanding this, "the BRICS presented and made itself a vector for changing global governance, acting by soft balancing the global hegemonic powers" (Albino et al., 2021, 2).[11]

Other argued that the BRICS countries did not aspire to replace the current global order; instead, they wanted to reform the existing structures or create complementary ones (Stuenkel, 2017) to better accommodate their interests. For example, all BRICS members "insist on UN involvement in preventive diplomacy, crisis management, peace-making, and post-conflict peace-building" (Sergunin, 2021, 82).

Therefore, "within a competitive logic of rebalancing… supporting the BRICS should represent an alternative and not an opposition to the US or Europe, and it is not intended to discredit them" (Albino et al., 2021, 3). This is well represented by the New Development Bank (NDB), also known as the BRICS Bank, established in 2015 and headquartered in Shanghai (China). Created to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects in the BRICS countries and other emerging states, the NDB is seen as an alternative to the World Bank and the IMF (Golub, 2018).

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[9] http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/209

[10] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/mar/29/brics-new-world-order

[11] Soft-balancing, according to the authors, consists in the use of "non-military instruments to slow, thwart and undermine the unilateral policies of global superpowers" (Albino et al., 2021, 3).

Moreover, as far as analyses of BRICS documents are concerned, it is possible to highlight the following points concerning the group's view on international relations in general:

- The world should be multipolar, without any form of superpower dominance, and global politics should be defined by different centers of economic, political and civilizational influence.
- The world order should be based on the rule of international law and traditional mechanisms of global governance should become more representative of current day's realities, considering the increasing role of emerging economies.
- The architecture of financial governance should be reformed in order to empower developing economies, thus, responsibilities and voting power at institutions such as the World Bank and especially the IMF should be rearranged.

Table 3. WTO Dispute Settlement Data (1995–2021)

Top complainants	Place	Demands raised
United States	1°	124
European Union	2°	105
Canada	3°	40
Brazil	4°	34
Top respondents	Place	Demands against
United States	1°	156
European Union	2°	90
China	3°	47
Brazil	8°[12]	17

Source: Data compiled by the author. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/dispu_by_country_e.htm

Apart from criticisms towards the Bretton Woods institutions coming from BRICS, the World Trade Organization (WTO)[13] also became an object of criticism by many countries, especially regarding its ineptitude in dealing with the European Union's (EU) continued avoidance to adhere to rules that could cause the liberalization of agriculture products in its market, something that affects commodity-rich exporting powers such as Brazil. Still, dissatisfied states use the WTO´s available mechanisms to complain about trade abuses more often than not, as exemplified by the fact that Brazil itself is the 4th most complainant state before the WTO´s dispute settlement body in the period 1995–2021, according to data from the organization (WTO, 2022).

In the case of the WTO, Brazil is actively involved both as a complainant and as a respondent to trade-related litigations. Moreover, the WTO's sixth Director-General, Roberto Azevedo, who occupied the post from 2013 to 2020, was Brazilian, which

[12] Alongside Australia, with the same number.

[13] Previously named the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), it was established in 1948 and became the WTO in 1995.

was considered of great symbolic relevance to the country.[14] Be it as it may, international organizations such as the WTO are fundamental in creating and establishing broader agreed-upon regulations, while at the same time providing a stable structure for cooperation between states, regardless of some perceived drawbacks.[15]

5. Challenges ahead for Brazil

Brazil is the 5th biggest country in the world in terms of territory[16] and population (212 million people) and the 12th biggest economy (with its 2020 GDP estimated at 1.44 trillion US$)[17]. However, although possessing impressive numbers as the ones mentioned previously, the country "cannot hope to become a dominant power in any future global order because of its lack of material resources. Brazil is not a Great Power. Great Powers are those states that, through their great economic, political and military strength, are able to exert power over world diplomacy" (Flemes, 2010, 2).

Brazil, therefore, is not recognized as a "Great Power," in the sense of being a state that bears 'special responsibilities' in the management of systemic affairs. In fact, the country "has never been able to match its territorial assets with military or economic might".[18] Thus, without perspectives of becoming a Great Power in the foreseeable future, Brazil depends on international rules and organizations in order to achieve its political goals. In the words of Lima (2010, p. 174), without the support of nuclear-military capabilities, but being "an active participant in the globalized economy… Brazil will necessarily have to make use of its political-diplomatic coordination to assert its interests on the international stage."

In this sense, Brazil needs to look for multilateral solutions for international problems, aiming at the creation (as well as the strengthening) of rules and institutions of global governance (Flemes, 2010). After all, Brazil's reputation has traditionally relied on its constructive role in supporting rules and norms in addressing acute problems of international life (Stuenkel, 2018). Brazil, alongside other regional powers, believes however that the size of its territory and population, as well as its economic potential, qualify the country "for a higher status in the international system" (Sergunin, 2019, p. 115), thus explaining the country's bid for a bigger voice in world affairs. That goal, in turn, has traditionally been sought by the reinforcement of its role as a responsible regional power in Latin America and by sharing the multilateral values

[14] Brazil, nevertheless, accounts for only 0.93% of total world import and 1.2 % of total world export.

[15] Meaning that organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, the IMF or even the WTO — where less developed countries have a chance to voice their opinions — are not yet ideally configured when it comes to issues related to representativeness and power [re]distribution within their structures.

[16] Comprising almost 50% of all South American landmass.

[17] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most_recent_value_desc=false

[18] https://www.thecairoreview.com/ essays/itamaratys-mission/

within the international community (Pecequilo, 2008). It is reasonable that Brazil is an active member of important political groups such as the G20, the WTO and BRICS, highlighting the country´s involvement in global affairs.

Nevertheless, the last elections in Brazil brought an unexpected factor to the issue of different points of view regarding foreign policy. Speaking during the country's 2018 presidential race, former Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs Aloysio Nunes stated that all the candidates of that time, as well as the National Congress, were "in favor of multilateralism because they understand that it is necessary to have international rules that must be respected by all."[19] Yet, as mentioned in Jair Bolsonaro's (the president elected in 2018) Government Plan, Brazil should instead focus on bilateral relations and agreements (PSL, 2018, 79), giving them preference before multilateral ones, a statement that runs contrary to the country's diplomatic traditions. According to some, that was indeed the case, since Bolsonaro does not see himself limited by the long tradition of Brazilian foreign policy. Quite the contrary, his political identity is built on the narrative of radical change (Stuenkel, 2018).

When Nunes was questioned by BBC before the electoral results about "what would be the impact on Brazil´s international relations if Jair Bolsonaro becomes president?"[20] the former Minister demonstrated concern over possible controversies that could come at the expense of Brazil´s interests, due to the peculiar personality of Bolsonaro. Stuenkel (2018b), for example, stated that "following Trump's example and rejecting the multilateral international order will be much more damaging to Brazil than it has been to the United States," since Brazil, unlike the US, is much more dependent on international rules and norms due to its middle-power status. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, "a cooperation based on collective acting is preferable to facing the pandemic focused on bilateral relations" (Alves & Zen, 2021, 120).

Moreover, Brazil's foreign policy options are "strongly limited… [once the country] is not situated on the core areas of the international system and dominates relatively modest material resources" (Albino et al., 2021, 18), as mentioned earlier. Despite being the largest economy in Latin America, Brazil lacks the necessary resources to engage in an "arm wrestling" with the international system, as the US has done in the recent past under the Trump administration, since "the rules that apply to the US differ from those that apply to Brazil. We need the international system to secure our territorial sovereignty and exercise our rights… We also need the system to defend our economic interests and combat unfair trade practices." (Dantas, 2018).

During the first years of the new government, Brazil concentrated efforts on a number of problems in the domestic front (aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis), which complicated the country's role on the international stage, including its engagement with

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[19] https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/eleicoes/2018/noticias/bbc/2018/09/27/bolsonaro-nao-traria-retrocesso-a-relacoes-internacionais-diz-ministro.htm?fbclid=IwAR3_uZDRycttJv5PEP-hlCtDizKC4lSGmkypibc3L0OPI_AWgs5dY3n-YKkg

[20] Ibid.

the G4, BRICS and the UN. When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic more specifically, "the Bolsonaro administration [once] claimed that the Chinese had spread the virus across the world for economic and geopolitical reasons" (Farias et al., 2022, 9), very similar to Trump's discourse in the United States. At the same time, Bolsonaro's reaction to the number of COVID-19 related deaths in Brazil (which currently exceeds 580 thousand, second only to the United States) was considered by some as a demonstration of "callous indifference" to the health crisis amidst a "context of a prolonged economic recession and recurring attacks on democratic institutions, most of the time stirred by Bolsonaro himself" (Farias et al., 2022, 8).

6. Bolsonaro's position on (de)globalization

To better understand Bolsonaro's position on (de)globalization, one should look to the personnel that composed his presidential administration. Ernesto Araújo, for instance, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs under Bolsonaro, once suggested that Brazil should have questioned the relevance of BRICS, focusing instead on the creation of a "nationalist coalition of countries" including the United States,[21] Brazil itself, Italy, Russia and others, in order to become an "anti-globalist BRICS without China".[22] Such a view is of particular importance, since "the national interest expressed in the foreign policy of a country has to do with the preferences and interests of the political group that wins in internal conflicts" (Missagia, 2021, p. 134), with Bolsonaro's associates showing a clear contempt for both globalization and multilateralism.[23]

Meanwhile, by disseminating conspiracy theories involving international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations, Bolsonaro managed to inspire part of his electorate with the idea of a struggle between

[21] Bolsonaro once called himself "a friend of the United States," and his travels to — as well as admiration towards — America had a symbolic effect on his electoral basis, which holds a certain fascination for the US. Bolsonaro's rhetoric during and after his elections even prompted some vehicles of media around the world to label him "The Trump of the Tropics." https://oglobo.globo.com/mundo/encontro-com-george-bush-deve-ser-ponto-altoda-visita-de-bolsonaro-ao-texas-23659464

[22] https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/amp/mundo/2018/12/futuro-chanceler-propos-a-bolsonaro-pacto-cristao-com-eua-e-russia.shtml?__twitter_impression=true&fbclid=IwAR2PkGwdp_El58ju31 qhOtOgDG37VLCXIAj2weyjYSm_2VZ7Muhad63B3Js Be it as it may, as argued by Brazilian specialists, "the positive view on the BRICS [in Brazil] is not the result of anti-Americanism, but rather of an intimate relationship with the BRICS countries" (Albino et al, 2021, 18).

[23] Nevertheless, during the 2019 BRICS summit in Brasilia, the group agreed on adding to its final declaration a section named "Strengthening and reforming the multilateral system," declaring their intention to help "overcome the significant challenges currently facing multilateralism," in an implicit allusion to the growing trend of economic protectionism and unilateral decisions that ultimately undermine international stability.

totalitarianism (guided by globalist ideas that, according to him, include: lockdown, masks, social distancing, mandatory vaccination) on the one hand, and individual liberties (Farias et al., 2022) and national sovereignty — on the other. Globalism, in this context, can be loosely interpreted as a complex and intertwined network of ideas that tend to infiltrate national boundaries so as to weaken them, melting together national cultures into a cosmopolitan whole led by globalization processes that ultimately cause the "erosion of state sovereignty" (Golubev, 2017, p. 106). Accordingly, globalism was considered a "boogeyman" "for ultraconservative groups that consider… [IOs] as part of a communist plot" (Alves & Zen, 2021, p. 116) guided by cultural Marxism.

Be it as it may, in today's reality, globalization has, in fact, transcended traditional distinctions between local, national and global politics, for domestic events can now rapidly become internationally discussed due to the Internet and news networks that provide almost real-time updates of what is happening in virtually any country in the world. The era of globalization has also driven common concerns for the whole international community related, for instance, to environmental issues.[24] On this note, recent European criticism of Amazon fires was ascribed by a coterie of closely allied ministers and advisers of Bolsonaro as "a globally coordinated campaign to weaken Brazil's territorial integrity and keep it from developing economically" (Stuenkel, 2019).

Accordingly, because of this negative view on globalization, movements of cultural parochialism have surfaced in many states, as local governments (such as the one represented by Bolsonaro) sought to reaffirm their countries' traditional identities against the external threat of "globalism." In fact, since the beginning of the 2000s, specialists have observed that the political map in South America was undergoing profound changes due to the emergence of social movements and new leaderships, which has emphasized a resurgent nationalist and anti-globalization — or (de)globalization — movement (Barbosa, 2008a). At the same time, this reaffirmation of national identities became a priority for many governments "partly because so many people see their national or community identity as under assault from globalizing and homogenizing forces" (Mazarr et al., 2018, 15). As Zakaria once put it: "It may seem paradoxical that globalization and economic modernization are breeding political nationalism, but that is so only if we view nationalism as a backward ideology, certain to be erased by the onward march of progress" (Zakaria, 2008, 33).

Arguably, nationalism has not only not been erased from the political map, but it has also become one of the main paradigms of our time. In this context, some of the actions taken by Bolsonaro´s government seem to indicate a clear disengagement from

[24] In regards to environmental protection — which becomes a necessity due to technological advances and mismanagement of resources and disposable materials — states' ignorance in this area may lead to increased pollution and deforestation, causing as a result transboundary damage and negative effects on the levels of global warming.

internationalism through an attitude that shows traits of (de)globalization. For instance, in 2019, the Bolsonaro administration confirmed Brazil´s withdrawal from the UN migration pact,[25] an important document that deals with countries' responsibility in face of migration crisis around the world. The issue of migration, in turn, is of special importance to Brazil, since the country borders Venezuela, which has been facing an economic, political and humanitarian crisis since 2015, as a result of which more than 4 million people left the country as refugees, most of whom ended up in Brazil itself.

Meanwhile, the country´s new ideological agenda contains the recognition of Brazil as a protagonist in the "alleged regeneration of the Western civilization"[26] through the fight against globalizing trends. Due to these (de)globalization attitudes and ideas of the current Brazilian President, Brazil started to pay less attention to its commitment with BRICS partners, instead focusing on its political relations with the United States (especially during the Trump administration) and Israel, thus alienating a number of Middle-Eastern and African states, as well as undermining Brazil's traditional inclination towards multilateralism in global affairs.

However, after Trump left the US presidency and Biden came to power, the Brazilian leadership faced a new set of challenges related to the search for different directions of Bolsonaro's foreign policy. Although at the beginning of his presidency, Bolsonaro looked to America for strengthening Brazil's positions internationally, with Trump's absence in the White House, the Brazilian president moved towards a relative rapprochement with BRICS partners and, in particular, with Russia.

If, on the one hand, some Russian journals affirmed that Bolsonaro's "task as president of Brazil was to destroy joint projects with Russia — [with] Bolsonaro cop[ing] with this task quite successfully,"[27] then in more recent times, the Brazilian President, contrary to most Western leaders and to the United States itself, sought to build closer ties with Russia and with Russian businesses.

In December 2021, when accepting the credentials of foreign ambassadors in Moscow, President Vladimir Putin addressed the Brazilian envoy, inviting Jair Bolsonaro to pay an official visit to Russia early next year. As one Russian magazine claimed at the time, despite the fact that the ceremony "was attended by ambassadors of 20 different states… including allies and priority economic partners of [Russia]… only Bolsonaro received a personal public invitation."[28]

Jair Bolsonaro's official visit to Moscow finally took place in February, when the Brazilian President manifested "solidarity" with Russia, contrary to most of the international community, which by that time did not want to pay attention

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[25] https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/01/08/em-comunicado-a-diplomatas-governo-bolsonaro-confirma-saida-de-pacto-de-migracao-da-onu.ghtml

[26] https://oglobo.globo.com/mundo/encontro-com-george-bush-deve-ser-ponto-alto-da-visita-de-bolsonaro-ao-texas-23659464

[27] https://vz.ru/politics/2021/12/4/1132371.html

[28] Ibid.

to Moscow's demands to NATO concerning safety guarantees. Sometime later, when Russia initiated its special military operation in Ukraine, Bolsonaro's administration decided not to follow the global trend and sanctions headed by the West. In fact, Bolsonaro did not impose sanctions against Russia, at the same time refraining from criticizing Moscow's actions in Ukraine. Although there may have been pragmatic reasons behind Bolsonaro's reaction to the crisis, such as supplying Brazilian agricultural products to the Russian Federation while expanding bilateral trade (especially concerning fertilizers and chemicals imported from Russia), other important aspects seemed to permeate the Brazilian President's logic.

One of these aspect concerns the support Brazil received from Russia when, according to Bolsonaro, NATO countries considered the possibility of relativizing Brazilian sovereignty over the Amazon. Moreover, Bolsonaro, unlike most of the Western leaders, seemed to demonstrate that Brazil was indeed sensitive to Russia's demands for security guarantees (on issues such as the expansion of the NATO military alliance to the east and the lack of arms control agreements in Europe) (Sputnik, 2022), which also puts the Brazilian President on the path opposite to that of American and European leaders.

Conclusion

Brazil's participation at innumerous IOs and different political groups (such as BRICS and the G4) attests to the balanced Brazilian foreign policy and to the country's search for a better place within international institutions of global governance. Although Brazil does not criticize the work of the UN as a whole, the country considers its Security Council unrepresentative of the current global realities, with a frozen configuration of power that dates back to the post-World War II period. At the same time, through BRICS, Brazil also criticizes the "excessive Western inclination" of the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as the austerity policies imposed on borrowing countries by the IMF. Nevertheless, Brazil has traditionally been a supporter of globalization and especially of multilateralism in global affairs, positions that were threatened under the new Brazilian administration of Jair Bolsonaro.

Now that the country is facing acute economic problems aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis, Bolsonaro's government pays less attention to Brazil's traditional commitment to multilateralism, demonstrating a lack of enthusiasm for the country's involvement in important political groups, such as BRICS and the G4. Meanwhile, fearing the effects of the so-called globalism, Jair Bolsonaro and his political associates (including former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ernesto Araujo) began to propagate that Brazil was infiltrated by an 'obscure cosmopolitan agenda' whose main goal was to undermine the country's sovereignty.

All in all, with slogans such as "America First" voiced by President Donald Trump during his presidential campaign in the United States and "Brazil above everything, God above everyone" voiced by Bolsonaro during the last presidential race in Brazil,

the world has witnessed a fierce movement of (de)globalization propelled by leaders in different parts of the globe who believe that globalization and its globalist offspring are directed against their own governments and states.[29]

Within this scenario and if this tendency of electing leaders with similar views worldwide continues, globalization may indeed be under threat, which may turn into a source of instability in the coming years. Be it as it may, it remains to be seen how Bolsonaro's approach to international relations will play out in the long run. However, one certainty still remains: there won't be an easy way out of the current economic and political crisis for Brazil, especially taking into account its domestic societal cleavages and the consequences of the country's mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recently, in view of the current economic and political crisis involving Russia, NATO and Ukraine, Bolsonaro's attitudes went in the opposite direction compared to most international leaders when the Brazilian president not only refrained from criticizing Russia's operation in Ukraine, but also did not join the hardline sanctions undertaken by the West and the United States against Moscow.[30] Nevertheless, although Bolsonaro's actions so far demonstrated caution in terms of openly supporting one side or the other, maintaining Brazil's diplomatic balance between Ukraine and Moscow will be yet another challenge for Bolsonaro's administration in the months ahead.

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[29] As well as international organizations that, according to those leaders, are supposedly acting to the detriment of their country´s sovereignty in dealing with internal affairs.

[30] https://vz.ru/politics/2021/12/4/1132371.html

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