

## **Brazilian Foreign Policy: a comprehensive overview**

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In this article, we will examine the paradigms shaping Brazilian foreign policy from the time Brazil became a republic at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. We understand that a country's foreign policy is influenced by its historical and geopolitical conditions, which leads to a thread of continuity over time, although the specifics of the policy may alter. While not formally specified, it is generally accepted that the central focus of Brazilian foreign policy is to serve national economic development.

### **The First Republic (1889-1930)**

The Baron of Rio Branco served as Brazil's chancellor from 1902 to 1912, working under four different presidents. He was a key figure in Brazilian diplomacy, and we owe him our country's pacifist vocation. While he aspired for Brazil to have a prominent role, commensurate with its continental size, he opposed a hegemonic stance. Following this logic, he skillfully and with great success resolved, through diplomacy, numerous border disputes with neighboring countries. The Baron also recognized the shifting of global power from London to Washington, which prompted him to seek closer ties with the United States. His strategy aimed to address Brazil's regional needs without fully surrendering to American dominance (BUENO, 2023).

## **Vargas Era (1930-1945)**

A particularly sensitive topic in Brazil's foreign relations was World War II and the decision of which side to support. This occurred under the authoritarian rule of populist leader Getúlio Vargas, who came to power in part due to the impact of the global economic crisis on Brazil. Initially, Brazil adopted a policy of pragmatic neutrality, acknowledging its peripheral position in global affairs and attempting to profit from the rivalry between the conflicting blocs. The pendulum approach aimed to attract resources to develop an industrial complex and reduce Brazil's reliance on foreign nations. However, after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, this strategy became untenable, and Brazil aligned itself with the United States in exchange for financial and technological support to build a national steel industry.

It is important to note that, during this time, the Brazilian government began investing in the creation of a unified national identity, seeking to eliminate the cultural and political fragmentation that divided the country. Given the strength of Italian, German, and Japanese immigrant communities, the government banned schooling and the publication of periodicals in languages other than Portuguese (KOIFMAN, 2023).

## **The Cold War and Aftermath**

The Cold War and its accompanying ideological polarization had a profound impact on Latin America, particularly because the region found itself under the orbit of American power. The U.S. prioritized funding for regions more distant or heavily impacted by the war, viewing them as more vulnerable to the spread of communism. The lack of international investment and meaningful economic returns for Brazil, despite its alliance with the U.S., led the country to reassess the benefits of automatic alignment with Washington.

By the early 1960s, Brazil's foreign policy began to prioritize North-South issues, seeking to diversify its international partners and reestablish diplomatic and commercial ties with countries regardless of their political ideologies. The goal of Brazil's Independent Foreign Policy was to gain greater international autonomy and champion anti-colonialist and anti-

imperialist causes. However, this policy was short-lived, as widespread public discontent highlighted internal contradictions within the country, ultimately leading to the establishment of an authoritarian regime in 1964 (MANZUR, 2014).

### **The Military Regime (1964 – 1985)**

Initially, the Brazilian military regime distanced itself from the multilateralism and Third World-oriented policies that its predecessors had promoted, shifting instead towards an East-West interpretation of international dynamics and pushing for increased military and political cooperation with the United States. As differing visions for the country's development came to power, Brazil's foreign policy was accordingly adjusted. Following the adoption of the 1967 Constitution, the regime identified underdevelopment as the primary obstacle to both national and international security, and sought to expand and diversify its foreign markets, focusing on closer ties with the Third World.

The 1973 oil crisis disrupted Brazil's "economic miracle"—a period of sustained high GDP growth over the previous five years (averaging 10% annually)—and reinforced the need to pursue this strategic approach. The key features of this period, known as responsible pragmatism, were a realistic assessment of the international context and a strong emphasis on Brazil's autonomy. Among its global initiatives, Brazil re-established diplomatic relations with China, strengthened ties with Arab nations, and in Africa supported the independence of former Portuguese colonies, Angola and Mozambique, both of which adopted Marxist-Leninist ideologies.

Interestingly, the military regime, which had previously faced relatively little criticism for its repressive practices, began to encounter growing international disapproval—despite the fact that a controlled process of political détente and liberalization was already underway (SPEKTOR,2004).

### **Re-democratization and the 21st century**

Brazil's re-democratization, following the adoption of the 1988 Constitution, did not lead to a break with previous foreign policy paradigms but reinforced the understanding that autonomy requires active exposure to the world. The 21st century brought a geopolitical

reconfiguration with China's rise to global power, positioning itself as the driving force of the world economy. In Brazil, the first two decades of this century largely coincided with the Workers' Party government. Confronted with the challenges of a new global order, and particularly after the 2008 global financial crisis, Brazilian foreign policy has advocated for a genuinely multipolar world and actively sought to expand South-South dialogue and strengthen cooperation with other emerging nations (VIGEVANI, CEPALUNI, 2007).

Brazil's pursuit of a reform in global governance, notably regarding the composition of the UN Security Council, reflects its ambition to play a more prominent role on the international stage. Its membership of the BRICS facilitates access to multilateral organizations that provide investment and credit.

Brazil has a longstanding tradition of diplomacy and commitment to pacifism that it does not want to squander. As such, it aims to continue navigating the global order independently and peacefully, while safeguarding its national interests and maintaining global stability.

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