

The Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy: anti-globalism vs pragmatism in Bolsonaro's foreign policy for South American integration

A Diplomacia do Mito Conspiratório: anti-globalismo vs pragmatismo na Política Externa de Bolsonaro para a integração Sul-Americana

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Recebimento do artigo Agosto de 2021 | **Aceite** Outubro de 2021

Abstract: In the debate on the role of South American integration, most scholars and political actors who have been making and/or influencing foreign policy decisions in Brazil reckoned regional integration as instrumental for achieving Brazilian pragmatic interests. However, the Brazilian foreign policymakers under President Bolsonaro, between 2019 and early 2021, did not engage in the practical issues of such debate, while ruining Unasur, and could have unpleasant consequences for Mercosur. Why and how does Bolsonaro's Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy affect South American integration? This paper presents how South American integration initiatives contribute to pragmatic Brazilian interests concerning autonomy, development, and security. It relies on the concepts of epistemic community and foreign policy community in Brazil to explain the country's previous support for regional integration and the Brazilian foreign relations contradictions under Bolsonaro's administration. The methodology is qualitative, employs a literature review and uses statements from public authorities as primary sources. **Keywords:** Brazil; South America; Mercosur; Bolsonaro; Brazilian foreign policy.

¹ Laís Forti Thomaz thanks the financial support by the Distrito Federal Foundation (SEI-GDF No. 798/2019 - FAPDF/SUCTI/COOTEC).

Resumo: No debate sobre o papel da integração sul-americana, a maioria dos estudiosos e atores políticos que vêm tomando e / ou influenciando as decisões de política externa no Brasil considerou a integração regional um instrumento para alcançar os interesses pragmáticos brasileiros. No entanto, os formuladores da política externa brasileira de Jair Bolsonaro, entre 2019 e o início de 2021, não se envolveram nas questões práticas desse debate, enterrando a Unasul e pode ter desagradáveis consequências para o Mercosul. Por que e como a Diplomacia do Mito Conspiratório de Bolsonaro afetou a integração sul-americana? Este artigo apresenta como as iniciativas de integração sul-americanas contribuem para os interesses pragmáticos brasileiros em matéria de autonomia, desenvolvimento e segurança. Baseia-se no conceito de comunidade epistêmica e comunidade de política externa no Brasil para explicar o apoio anterior do país à integração regional e as contradições das relações exteriores brasileiras sob o governo de Bolsonaro. A metodologia é qualitativa a partir de uma revisão da literatura, utilizando também como fontes primárias declarações de autoridades públicas. **Palavras-chave:** Brasil; América do Sul; Mercosul; Bolsonaro; Política externa brasileira.

1. INTRODUCTION

On July 8, 2021, Brazil took on the temporary presidency of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). In his opening speech, President Jair Bolsonaro stated that he wants to modernize the bloc agenda in order to “recover its original values, seeking a greater and better integration of our economies in regional and international value chains”. (BRASIL, 2021). This vague statement did not reflect the uncertainties of Mercosur during the Bolsonaro administration, given his conservative-nationalist stance.

Currently, radical shifts marked a moment of disruption in the otherwise relatively stable Brazilian foreign policy traditions. (ALMEIDA, 2019; CASARÕES, 2020; CHAGAS-BASTOS, FRANZONI, 2019; RICUPERO, 2019). It included plans of moving the Brazilian Embassy in Israel from Telaviv to Jerusalem, prioritizing the traditional partnership with the United States of America (U.S.), having diplomatic issues with China, and detaching from multilateral endeavors within the United Nations (UN).

The recent demise of the Union of South American Nations (Unasur), which was founded in 2008, was a direct consequence of such changes. It is critical to understand the fundamentals of Bolsonaro’s foreign policy for regional integration because Mercosur is under a similar threat. Mercosur’s relative endurance might have been a result of both its 30-years long existence, consolidated institutional structure, and relevance for strong economic interest groups in each member State. This issue is currently being analyzed by researchers, who also address the EU-Mercosur agreement, which, after 20 years of negotiations, was finally signed during the first year of Bolsonaro’s term; but it has not been ratified because of EU concerns with the Brazilian government’s regression regarding environmental protection policies.

The most fanatic supporters of Bolsonaro have been calling him “myth” since the 2018 presidential campaign. Contrastingly, in this article, despite the risk of degrading the historical value of myths (KERSHAW, 2007), Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy refers to the mythical and conspiratory nature of Bolsonaro’s foreign policy. By principle, myths relate to real-life situations through stories notwithstanding the lack of objective truths or empirical grounds. (LEXICO, 2021). Accordingly, Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy is detached from the solid grounds of history, science, and professional policy recommendations.

Why and how does Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy affect South American integration? This paper presents the Bolsonaro administration's perspective on Unasur and Mercosur. It contrasts this perspective with the notions of previous political leaderships, the foreign policy community and the epistemic community in Brazil about national pragmatic interests in such initiatives. Its approach integrates these concepts. This paper aims to describe the ideological and conceptual assumptions underpinning Bolsonaro's foreign policy for South American integration initiatives, focusing on Mercosur and Unasur. By doing so, it helps to explain how Brazil has been undermining regional integration. The first section presents the concepts of the foreign policy community and epistemic community and how they will be applied in Bolsonaro's foreign policy formulation context. The second summarizes Brazilian pragmatic interests in South American integration. The third contextualizes the crises in both Unasur and Mercosur. The fourth explains the central ideas orienting Bolsonaro's foreign policy for the region during Araújo's term, which started in 2019 and ended when he resigned on March 29, 2021.

2. EPISTEMIC COMMUNITY VS ANTI-GLOBALIST MOVEMENT

Political leadership is understood as those directly implementing foreign policy, starting with Bolsonaro, the Chief of State, and Ernesto Araújo, the Foreign Minister. It includes individuals temporarily empowered as policymakers, such as the former Presidential advisor Filipe Martins, and the chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee Eduardo Bolsonaro (the President's son). In sum, political leadership is the core of the foreign policy community.

Foreign policy community refers to a group of "people who participate in decision-making and/or substantially contribute to the formation of opinion with regards to the country's international relations". (SOUZA, 2009, p. 2). It includes public authorities, congresspeople, scholars, journalists, and businesspeople. Souza (2009) assumes that, to know what a country will do, one must understand the beliefs of those who directly or indirectly influence its foreign policy. He employed surveys on various issues to assess the community's beliefs. He studied the Brazilian foreign policy community and showed to which degree they converge in such topics. This paper carefully uses such assessment when discussing topics in which there is a quasi-consensus, a prevailing stance, or a controversy.

The foreign policy community also contains the epistemic community. Epistemic communities are political actors making and/or influencing foreign policy decisions (ADLER 1992; CROSS, 2013). They are knowledge-based networks defined by expertise rather than the political agency. Cross (2013) has brought to the center of the discussion the need for internal cohesion in this epistemic community, which is possible with a common culture and sharing some ethical principles, highlighting its adaptation and integrity. Their recognized knowledge is also based on scientific methods in a broad way, which means that it has to include an accumulation of scientific truths related to theories and logic models, but they are not expected to be only academic researchers. When there is great uncertainty related to a problem of extreme complexity, there is a tendency for this type

of community to emerge to help solve it. Usually, the State is the one that calls the epistemic community to solve these problems and can even aggregate it inside the bureaucratic machine (CROSS, 2013).

Brazilian diplomats are extremely professional and, although individual perceptions are not always the same, prominent diplomats, including Foreign Ministers of previous administrations, converge in core traditional and pragmatic practices of Itamaraty (CARDOSO *et al.*, 2020; SPECHOTO, 2021). Pragmatism refers to carefully planned result-oriented policy based on cost-benefit assessment and scenario analysis. The Brazilian epistemic community broadly attributes pragmatism to foreign policy decisions based on a realistic and strategic approach aimed at achieving practical and fairly objective interests (CERVO, 2008; PINHEIRO, LIMA 2018; RICUPERO, 2017).

There are even some scholar-style diplomats (the ones engaged in academic debates) who can participate in both foreign policy and epistemic communities (CERVO, 2008; FONSECA, 2011; RICUPERO, 2011; SARAIVA, 2020). In this sense, this paper acknowledges R. Ricupero, P. R. de Almeida, C. L. N. Amorim, R. A. Barbosa, G. Fonseca Jr., C. Lafer, and L. F. Ligiero. as part of that group.

In many parts of the world, the so-called New Right movements “have, over several decades, theorized and strategically mobilized globalized economic dislocation and cultural resentment, developing a coherent sociological critique of globalization.” (ABRAHAMSEN *et al.*, 2020, p. 95). In Brazil, Olavo de Carvalho and his network share some of these assumptions and he has a strong influence on Bolsonaro’s foreign policy decisions, especially related to Araújo’s approach. Carvalho ignores both scientific methods and academic debates on foreign policy and Itamaraty principles, and this is one of the features distinguishing this epistemic community. Given the gap between Carvalho and those in that field, this paper addresses the experts in the field as an epistemic community, while citing Carvalho and his followers when discussing the anti-globalist movement that are represented by Bolsonaro’s foreign policy.

Throughout this paper, the pragmatic nature of beliefs, interests and actions contrasts with the ideas of Bolsonaro’s political leadership. Within the framework of such a notion, there is a genuine debate with different ideas on how Brazil should address regional integration. However, there is a divide between such serious debates and the core ideas behind Bolsonaro’s foreign policy.

First, Bolsonaro’s foreign policy breaks long-standing diplomatic traditions. His foreign policymakers conceive an alternative – and rather unscientific – history of Brazilian foreign policy. They do not echo historical paradigms of the so-called “accumulated history of Brazilian diplomacy” (CERVO, 2008, p. 26) and other ways the specialized literature interprets the past in general and South American politics in particular (ALBUQUERQUE *et al.*, 2006; CERVO, BUENO, 2010; LESSA *et al.*, 2014; RICUPERO, 2017). Second, what the Brazilian epistemic community conceives as Brazilian pragmatic interests in South American integration clashes with the worldview of Bolsonaro’s first Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ernesto Araújo. Third, Bolsonaro’s cabinet snubs most of the Brazilian foreign policy community without clearly outsmarting or seriously debating them. These are the main assumptions on which this research is based.

3. BRAZILIAN PRAGMATIC INTERESTS IN UNASUR AND MERCOSUR

During most of the 20th century, Brazilian foreign policy was instrumental for autonomously creating a peaceful and favorable context for economic development. In this sense, there is a quasi-consensus among the epistemic community, including several prominent diplomats, on how “pragmatic interests” refer to autonomy, security and development (ALBUQUERQUE *et al.*, 2006; AMORIM, 2010; CERVO, BUENO, 2010; FONSECA, 1998; LIGIÉRO, 2011; PECEQUILO, 2008; RICUPERO, 2017).

Accordingly, the early 21st century’s scholarly debate about South American integration addressed political-diplomatic, strategic-military and economic-industrial dimensions. Most members of both the epistemic and the foreign policy communities in Brazil acknowledged enough pragmatic interests in South America to prioritize regional integration initiatives in the early 2000s (BANDEIRA, 2006; COUTO, 2009; LAFER, 2009; LIGIÉRO 2011; LIMA, 2007; MALAMUD, 2011; SEITENFUS, 2006; SIMÕES, 2012; SOUZA, 2009; SPEKTOR, 2010; PAGLIARI, 2009; VAZ, 2012; VIDIGAL, 2012).

Part of the literature sees regionalism as a response to globalization, which can constrain national autonomy (KEOHANE, NYE, 2001). Brazil responded accordingly, while trying to resist the pressures of globalization through regional political coordination (BARBOSA, 1998; CERVO, 2008; LIMA, 2005; ONUKI, 2006; PUNTIGLIANO, 2008; SPEKTOR, 2010).

Despite the lack of consensus among Brazilian scholars, autonomy in Brazilian foreign policy broadly refers to “a combination of systemic opportunities and the actions of agents wishing to alter the terms of the country’s insertion within the international order” (PINHEIRO, LIMA, 2018, p. 18). A widespread assumption is that, despite the size of its territory population and economy, Brazil is relatively weak in world politics and still lacks leverage to impose its will and interests by its own means. Most members of both the epistemic and the foreign policy communities see regional integration as a strategy to reinforce both political autonomy and economic development (AMORIM, 2010; BANDEIRA, 2006; CERVO, 2008; LIGIÉRO 2011; LIMA, 2005; ONUKI, 2006; SOUZA, 2009; SPEKTOR, 2010; VAZ, 2006). As discussed in scholarly debates, regional integration was a part of the Brazilian quest for autonomy through “partnership diversification” and multiple “South-South coalitions” in the “horizontal axis”. (LIMA, 2007; PECEQUILO, 2008; VIGEVANI, CEPALUNI, 2007; VIGEVANI *et al.* 2008). Accordingly, the National Defense White Book (BRASIL, 2012, p. 52) mentioned such “diversification of partnerships [...] without compromising traditional relations with partners from the developed world”. This document resulted from over decade-long debates with members of the aforementioned communities (PLUM, 2020).

The experience with Mercosur has proven how a regional bloc improved its members’ bargaining power when negotiating with the U.S. and the EU (CERVO, BUENO, 2010; ONUKI, 2006; SOUZA, 2009; VIGEVANI *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, the bloc’s political coordination improved voting convergence in multilateral negotiations in the UN General Assembly and the World Trade Organization. (AMORIM, 2010; HOFFMAN *et al.*, 2008).

On the one hand, most of the Brazilian foreign policy community believed that Mercosur contributed to increasing both Brazilian participation in world trade and political leverage in the multilateral agenda. On the other hand, a few members of the community believed that Brazil was prepared to engage in economic negotiations alone (without Mercosur). However, from 2001 to 2008, those in the Brazilian foreign policy community who believed Mercosur should be limited to a free trade area – instead of a customs union – increased from 4% to 21% (SOUZA, 2009).

With regards to Brazilian security interests, those experts relate autonomy to policy coordination and coalition-building among South American countries for jointly managing to keep at bay the possibility of great powers' interference in regional affairs. In this sense, regional security issues were increasingly being discussed either at Mercosur or at Unasur levels (ABDUL-HAK, 2013; CERVO, BUENO, 2010; COUTO, 2009; FUCCILLE & REZENDE, 2013; LIGIÉRO 2011; MAGALHÃES, SILVA, FELICIANO, 2017). In fact, before the creation of both blocs, the U.S. initiatives often prevailed in discussions within inter-American institutions about the agenda that the U.S. set. For instance, the Post-Cold War war on terrorism agenda was incompatible with the South American security agenda in the 21st century (CERVO, BUENO, 2010; LIMA, 2013)

South American states began to abandon their suspicion of their giant neighbor in the late 1970s, and the ensuing trust-building flourished as a consequence of bilateral agreements and regional institution-building, via the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) (1978), Mercosur (1991) and Unasur (2008) (ABDUL-HAK, 2013; CERVO, BUENO, 2010; HURRELL, 1998; ONUKI, 2006; VAZ, 2006). Accordingly, the Brazilian National Defense White Book (BRASIL, 2012) explicitly emphasized the process of strengthening South American joint action to address security issues within and outside the region. Additionally, Brazil's 2011 Strategic Plan for External Borders called for integration with neighboring countries to generate collective solutions for common problems. (SIMÕES, 2012).

Most members of the Brazilian foreign policy community understood the pressures for “internationalizing” the Amazon as a critical security threat which should be faced with – not against – the neighboring nations (SOUZA, 2009; VAZ, 2006). Both ACTO and Unasur were key instruments for that purpose (PATRIOTA, 2011) and encouraged bilateral arrangements through which Brazil shared surveillance and protection systems (PAGLIARI, 2009; VAZ, 2012). The discovery of the pre-salt oil reserves along Brazilian shores in 2006 elevated the priority to regional cooperation for protecting the Brazilian continental shelf (FUCCILLE, REZENDE, 2013; LIMA, 2013; OLIVEIRA *et al.* 2016; PAGLIARI, 2009). In this context, South American cooperation became a vital asset in a scenario in which Brazil must protect its oil platforms against an external power (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2016).

Unasur had been solving regional security challenges through the promotion of confidence-building within member-states (ABDUL-HAK, 2013; FUCCILLE, REZENDE, 2013; MAGALHÃES, SILVA, FELICIANO, 2017). Other trust-building measures also included military exercises and training (REZENDE, 2015), and justice, police and intelligence cooperation against non-traditional threats related to drug and arms traffic (PAGLIARI, 2009; VAZ, 2006, 2012).

Additionally, in the 2000s, South America became the most important market for Brazilian arms exports, buying nearly two-thirds of these exports in 2011

(FUCCILLE, REZENDE, 2013; REZENDE, 2015). Likewise, energy security has been both a strategic need and a requirement for development. Nearly half of the Brazilian foreign policy community emphasized their support for integrating the regional energy market through stable regulations and proper infrastructure (SOUZA, 2009). The Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA), created in 2000 but managed under Unasur between 2008 and 2020, illustrates how regional integration goes hand-in-hand with development. It comprised over 500 infrastructure projects, including a road connecting Brazil to the Peruvian Pacific ports inaugurated in 2011 (UNASUR, 2014).

Both infrastructure and industrial development are acknowledged as pragmatic interests. The majority of the Brazilian foreign policy community supported the expansion of Mercosur towards South American economic integration (SOUZA, 2009). During the first years of Mercosur (1991-1998), Argentina absorbed more Brazilian manufactured exports than any other country except the U.S. Except for six years between 1995 and 2020, no other country (e.g. the U.S.) or regional bloc (e.g. EU) imported more industrialized products from Brazil than Unasur. Since 1995, Unasur has absorbed nearly a third of all Brazilian manufactured exports, on an annual average, reaching an apex of 40% in 2010 (UNCTADSTAT, 2020). Furthermore, the internationalization of Brazilian companies, which is an imperative amidst economic globalization, often focuses first on Mercosur and Unasur countries before going to other markets (LOHBAUER, 2010; REIS, 2007).

In sum, regional integration has been supporting Brazil's economic development, even though Unasur crumbled and Mercosur is under threat. This section also showed how regional integration is instrumental in increasing Brazil's autonomy and security.

4. THE DEMISE OF UNASUR AND THE THREAT AGAINST MERCOSUR (2010-2019)

Corruption scandals and the so-called politicization of Brazilian foreign policy framed the sequence of events that increased the divide between Bolsonaro's administration on the one side and the majority of both the epistemic and foreign policy community in Brazil on the other side. The process was intertwined at the regional and domestic levels. They were at the core of a dreadful crisis in Unasur. They also contributed to skepticism concerning Mercosur.

Foreign Policy politicization has been unraveling in Brazil since democratization in the late 1980s and has transformed foreign policy making in terms of more transparency, societal participation, and enmeshed with domestic partisan politics (LOPES, 2011; LIMA, 2013). In this context, it became increasingly hard for political parties to agree on fundamental notions of pragmatic State interests. Then, the political polarization fueled superficial debates on foreign policy. In fact, it became common to portray South American integration as a left-wing ideological project (ALMEIDA, 2019; CARVALHO, 2013; FLORÊNCIO SOBRINHO, SILVA FILHO, 2018; SARAIVA, 2020; RICUPERO, 2019; RUIC, 2018).

Notwithstanding the continuity of the Workers Party (PT, in Portuguese) in power, President Rousseff (2011-2016) ushered in a different phase in the history of Brazilian foreign policy. Presidential diplomacy declined, as well as Brazilian regional proactivity, whereas foreign policy, in general, became less than secondary to domestic politics (CERVO, LESSA, 2014; FLORENCIO SOBRINHO, SILVA FILHO, 2018; REZENDE, 2015; RICUPERO, 2017; SARAIVA, 2014; PINHEIRO, LIMA, 2018). Accordingly, the Foreign Minister, Antonio Patriota (2011-2013), kept the low-profile diplomacy approach. Like Minister Amorim before him, he recognized the value of South American regionalism for achieving Brazilian pragmatic interests, but circumstantial diplomatic problems, domestic political constraints, and regional political changes pushed Brazilian diplomacy to a low profile in Unasur, especially after Patriota replacement in 2013 (SIMÕES, 2012; RICUPERO, 2017).

In fact, almost nothing meaningful advanced in South American integration between 2013 and 2018. During the 2014 presidential elections, the party that had launched IIRSA in 2000, Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB, in Portuguese), now opposed PT's foreign policy towards South America and its emphasis on South-South cooperation in general (LIMA, 2018). Since 2002, PSDB was PT's biggest political contender and had less ambitious plans for the region, such as reducing Mercosur to a free trade area (ALMEIDA, 2018).

On the one hand, some claim that, during PT administrations, there was an unprecedented "party-driven foreign policy making", like a "parallel diplomacy", since murky decisions were made within PT – based on its own worldview and staff (ALMEIDA, 2014; FLORENCIO SOBRINHO, SILVA FILHO, 2018; RICUPERO, 2017)². On the other hand, "ideology was linked with a strong dose of pragmatism" in different administrations since the 1990s regarding Brazilian foreign policy to South America (SARAIVA, 2020).

Those "anti-PT" interpretations encouraged political parties and members of the foreign policy community to broadly reject Brazilian foreign policy between 2003 and 2016, including South American integration initiatives altogether. Large-scale corruption scandals known as "*Mensalão*" and "Operation Car Wash" also tainted PT's reputation (BBC, 2013; BBC 2018; BRASIL, 2020a). One of the schemes involved state companies and private national champion companies. Such scandals nurtured the perception that the role of Brazilian foreign policy in upholding regional integration was reduced to hiding the schemes behind overvalued contracts by which Brazilian state-funded companies have built infrastructure in countries ruled by Left-Wing governments.

Opposition parties instrumentalized the foreign agenda, foreign Minister José Serra (2016-2017), who was affiliated with PSDB, illustrated how foreign policy interplayed with domestic politics. While meeting parliamentarians and lobbyists to rally support for the 2018 presidential elections, he voiced harsh criticism against both "Bolivarian" presidents (mainly Venezuela) he deemed authoritarian and PT's "ideological" foreign policy for the region (SARAIVA, 2020).

² Some argue politicization of South American integration started when Lula da Silva supposedly removed IIRSA's technician-professional administration (FLORENCIO SOBRINHO; SILVA FILHO, 2018).

Since the 2016 impeachment, Bolsonaroists have been arguing that PT's foreign policy followed the Sao Paulo Forum's plan to supposedly dominate Latin America under socialist totalitarianism (CARVALHO, 2013). Many believed in the conspiracy theory that, in that Forum, left-wing parties had coordinated their agenda and strategies since 1990 (FORO DE SÃO PAULO, 2020; PT 2012).

However, the Forum's influence on PT's foreign policy was overestimated (SANCHES, 2019), let alone the Brazilian stance in support of regional integration since the 1950s. (VIDIGAL, 2012). No evidence supports the Forum's substantial influence in either the epistemic or the foreign policy communities in Brazil. Nonetheless, conspiracy fears linked regional integration with leftist ideology, which benefited the right in the Brazilian 2018 elections.

Between 2010 and 2016, the Brazilian political leadership seemed indifferent to crumbling democracies in the region under leftist governments, which framed perceptions of part of both voters and members of the Brazilian foreign policy community. Such bias supposedly motivated Brazil to orchestrate in Mercosur both the controversial suspension of Paraguay after the 2012 impeachment and the subsequent accession of Venezuela without the Paraguayan vote (RICUPERO, 2017). Some saw a general anti-hegemonic bias and a pro-Global South with arguably little or no pragmatic returns (ALMEIDA, 2014).

These perceptions were notorious in part of the Brazilian electorate during the 2016 impeachment, the 2018 elections, and the mass protests in the in-between. Both President Temer (2016-2018) and Bolsonaro acted accordingly. The aforementioned political crisis in Mercosur members and the economic turmoil experienced by the Brazilian economy since 2014 set the stage for yet another crisis. Between 2014 and 2019, Brazil defaulted on its 70% share of the Mercosur Fund for Structural Convergence, making it harder to achieve the objective of reciprocal assistance for development projects (RITTNER, 2019).

The socialist President of Venezuela held Unasur's Presidency Pro-Tempore between 2016 and 2017 amidst increasing authoritarianism in his country. Given the popular discourse among anti-PT voters about the supposed threat of Brazil becoming like Venezuela (CHAGAS; MODESTO; MAGALHÃES, 2019), Venezuela's prominent role in Unasur might have encouraged misperceptions about - and even opposition to - Unasur. In 2016, Mercosur suspended Venezuela (a member in the incorporation process since 2012) based on the bloc's democratic clause and Human Rights violations. In 2017, Brazil joined the Lima Group to pressure the Venezuelan President to peacefully restore democracy (BRASIL, 2017). Unasur did not elect its Secretary-General, given the disagreement about it since 2017.

Temer set the paths currently followed by Bolsonaro's policy for South America. Brazil filed its accession plea for the OECD in 2017. In 2018, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru suspended their participation in Unasur and the Brazilian exit became official in 2019. Before Bra-exit from Unasur, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Guyana and Peru created the Forum for the Progress of South America (Prosur) (BRASIL, 2020b).

As bipartisan polarization reached its apex in the late 2010s, serious debates within the epistemic community concerning Brazilian pragmatic interests in South America did not resonate on PT's main contender in the 2018 Presidential elections. In fact, Carvalho (2013) influenced many Bolsonaroists to believe that South American integration was a corrupt

ideological endeavor of socialist governments. Such interpretation did not come from Bolsonaro's former party, the Social Liberal Party (PSL, in Portuguese), so the concept of "foreign policy partisanship" does not apply. It did not derive from Itamaraty either (CHAGAS-BASTOS, FRANZONI, 2019; SPEKTOR, 2019).

Instead, that perspective derives from a "parallel diplomacy" behind the Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy, the so-called "anti-globalist faction", "Olavist group" (headed by Olavo de Carvalho) or "hatred cabinet" of the political leadership, including the head of the MFA. Within the MFA, Araújo (2019-2021) was disconnected from Itamaraty's more experienced and scholar-style diplomats (ALMEIDA, 2019; CASARÕES, 2020; CHAGAS-BASTOS, FRANZONI, 2019; RICUPERO, 2019). The outcast journalist and astrologist, self-proclaimed philosopher Carvalho had influenced a group of Bolsonaro's cabinet, especially the former Minister Araújo and former Presidential advisor Filipe Martins, and also the chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee Eduardo Bolsonaro. (ALMEIDA, 2019; CASARÕES, 2020).

5. THE CONSPIRACY-MYTH DIPLOMACY FOR SOUTH AMERICAN INTEGRATION (2019-2020)

Anti-globalism has been the cornerstone of Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy. Former Minister Araújo's ideas about anti-globalism and "Trump saving the West" (ARAÚJO, 2017) reached and found common ground with those of O. de Carvalho. Araújo declared he would implement "a foreign policy free of ideology" and "would not replace one ideology for another" yet he admitted that if "fighting ideology" is to be interpreted as an ideology, "so be it". He defines ideology as a theory to make sense of facts even when facts deny the theory (ARAÚJO, 2019a). He prioritized the promotion of a particular conception of Western ideology which opposes nationalist-conservative to globalist-multilateral policies. His alternative version of history and science indicates "conspiracy-based paranoia". In general, he denies what is commonly reckoned as facts and ideologies and offers new versions of both from the perspective of intellectuals, like Carvalho, whose ideas were unknown or rejected by experts in foreign policy until 2018.

Following what is promoted by the New Right movement (ABRAHAMSEN *et al.*, 2020), Araújo (2017, p. 354) treated geopolitics and development as secondary to what he deems as central: metapolitics, "the set of ideas, culture, philosophy, history and symbols that act on both the rational and emotional levels of consciousness". His combination of foreign policy with metapolitics entails the study of "theopolitics" to find a cultural-spiritual destiny in the world. He emphasized the need to fight the "globalist ideology", which was supposedly guided by what he called "cultural Marxism", anti-human and anti-Christian (ARAÚJO 2018a; ARAÚJO, 2019d).

He believed that Bolsonaro is a "culture warrior" who brings "lasting political transformation by spreading ideas and cultural values across society". According to this vision, "Bolsonaro's conservative, anti-globalist foreign policy has overlapping religious

and ideological elements” (CASARÕES 2020, p. 81, 85). Araújo (2017, p. 353) stated that globalism is “understood as the anti-national and anti-traditional liberal patterns in social life and the globalized market without borders in economic life”. Martins (2018) claims that globalism erodes democracies because it supposedly entails moving national decision-making processes to less transparent international institutions governed by expatriate bureaucrats.

Araújo and Martins usually refer to one of the three types of globalism which Carvalho (2011; 2013) “denounces”. It is Western globalism spearheaded by the Bilderberg Meetings and marked by cultural Marxism. He argues that each type of globalism has an agent of globalism, which is not equated to a specific class or nation. (RABINOVICI, 2018). Since none of these have the cohesion required for joint action, the agent of globalism is the group of powerful people at the Bilderberg Meetings, who supposedly have enough power for combined action to influence states. (CARVALHO, 2021).³

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that these people act jointly, particularly when noticing that different people participate in each conference and that they represent extremely different entities, including conservative and liberal political parties, Greenpeace and oil companies etc. They, or their original countries or even NATO do not relate to any sort of Marxism. Moreover, there are numerous conferences similar to Bilderberg’s (World Economic Forum, Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, Young Climate Leaders etc.), and there is no evidence supporting its unique importance.

Araújo (2017) believes that Trump proposes that Brazil “reconnect with the mythical heritage of the western past”. In spite of Araújo’s (2019e; 2019f) beliefs, he portrayed Brazil’s “New Foreign Policy” as pragmatic, while stressing the infrastructure projects with neighboring democracies and the centrality of Christianity and the West in the Brazilian soul. He has a peculiar perspective on pragmatism. The new foreign policy changed priorities, allies and enemies. He opposed multiculturalism and open borders, and aspires to regenerate Judeo-Christian foundations, akin to far-right rulers like Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu and Viktor Orbán (CASARÕES, 2020).

Furthermore, he does not seem to acknowledge cultural diversity as a central feature of Brazilian nationality and other Latin American nations. The assumption that Europeans and “European offshoots” recognize Brazil as their own civilizational kin (part of the so-called West) is rather debatable (LIMA, 2013). Finally, the assumption of a “natural” connection between the West and democracy is historically controversial, given the central role of the US in military coups against Latin American democracies and in supporting authoritarian governments in the region (BANDEIRA, 2006; LIMA, 2013).

In this sense, following anti-globalism, Brazil’s geographic reference became the West. Bolsonaro’s stance during the recent political crisis in Venezuela illustrated how he ignored the role of regional institutions to solve regional crises. He did not measure autonomy in terms of resisting external pressures from great powers in regional issues. Instead of a leading role

3 It is conspicuous that there is a board organizing annual meetings since 1954 with political, economic and intellectual elites to discuss global issues (BILDERBERG MEETINGS, 2021). In the 2019 meeting (BILDERBERG MEETINGS, 2019), every participant came from North American or European countries belonging to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), except Sweden, which is the only non-member of the military alliance but one of the handful of NATO’s special partners.

in consensus-building, Brazil has been performing a secondary role and adhering to the U.S. worldview, through which that crisis became a proxy of U.S.-Russia rivalry (RICUPERO, 2019). Some argue that the anti-globalist ideology has led Brazil to a pro-West bias, for instance, conceding national interests to please Trump's US and the alleged culture war against globalism (ALMEIDA, 2019; RICUPERO, 2019; THOMAZ *et al.*, 2021). This stance resembles the "automatic" or "unconditional" alignment to the U.S. in other moments of Brazilian history (CERVO, 2008; CERVO, BUENO, 2010; LIGIÉRO, 2011; RICUPERO, 2017).

The outcast perspective about Brazil and the West matches Araújo's rejection of multilateralism and regional integration. Araújo (2017) argued that the concepts of multilateralism, intergovernmentalism, global governance and universal values only disguise regional blocs and the UN push for supranationalism and world government at the expense of national values and sovereignty. The intergovernmental nature of Unasur and Mercosur, which apply consensus-based decision-making procedures (VIGEVANI *et al.* 2008; COUTO, 2009), confronts Araújo's claim on that matter. Therefore, anti-globalism drives Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy and generates uncertainty about the role of Brazil in both South American and global institutions.

Araújo (2017) called for national solutions as the best way of addressing Brazilian challenges. Conversely, most members of both the epistemic community and the foreign policy community understand the need for multilateral coordinated solutions for essentially transnational challenges, such as the aforementioned non-traditional threats and energy security.

The Cold War-style anti-communism mixed with conspiracy theories leads anti-globalists to trust in democratic countries with an anti-globalist government. This explains the admiration for the U.S., particularly for Trump (ARAÚJO, 2017). The Trump (and his advisor Steve Bannon) worldview of national self-reliance and suspicion of multilateral institutions guides Araújo's approach (KAHLER, 2017).

Brazil is bound for alignment with the U.S. as long as national conservatism remains in power (ALMEIDA, 2019; CASARÕES, 2020). During Araújo's term, anti-globalism guides Brazil's role in the world in support of the "modern" concepts of the West, Christianity and national-sovereignty in opposition to "post-modern" concepts of Human Rights, Universalism, Multilateralism and Regionalism (ARAÚJO, 2017).

Anti-globalists resent democracies that support multilateralism and regionalism altogether because they consider the UN, the European Union, World Trade Organization and others to be globalist institutions driven by Cultural Marxism towards the demise of nation-states and the dawn of socialism under a world government, dubbed "the New World Order". Needless to say, they despise and often offend non-democratic countries and leftist governments.

An additional characteristic of Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy is the lack of diplomacy in the sense of professional formulation-implementation of foreign policy as well as in impoliteness and disrespect for diplomatic protocols. The apocalyptic rhetoric featuring the discourses of Bolsonaro's political leadership fuels the Brazilian diplomatic crisis.

The diplomatic antithesis embedded in Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy diametrically contrasts with the formal, reasonable and convincing style that prevailed in the highly professional Brazilian diplomatic discourse which has been admired in most countries (CERVO, 2008; FONSECA Jr., 2011; RICUPERO, 2011, 2017).

Unable to acknowledge their own blatant contradictions, the anti-globalists' controversial and often offensive declarations have been disturbing Brazilian foreign affairs (CHAGAS-BASTOS; FRANZONI, 2019). They have been making amends only after other relevant political actors in Brazil show how such statements damage Brazilian pragmatic interests and its international reputation. The government's top military officials have been disgusted at the ideological "paranoia of anti-globalists" (CASARÕES, 2020). Parliamentarians also have been involved in damage-control after impulsive and even threatening declarations.

In the context of elections in Venezuela and the claim by the opposition leader for the Venezuelan Presidency, many feared a concrete intervention from Brazil after declarations of the Brazilian political leadership (MAZUI, 2019). Another episode occurred when Brazil sought to influence the Argentinean presidential elections and Araújo declared that "evil forces" took power with the victory of a leftist Presidential candidate (PHILIPS, 2019).

Despite not belonging to the anti-globalist faction, Paulo Guedes, head of the powerful Ministry of Economy, said that "when Mercosur was made, it was totally ideological" and that neither Mercosur nor Argentina had priority because the priority was economic reform following an austerity policy (RUIC, 2018). Such statements seemed to ignore the relevance of the regional market for Brazilian industry. The Brazilian Congress stepped in and sought to convince Bolsonaro of a more constructive approach towards Argentina (CASARÕES, 2020).

During a meeting about one of IIRSA's projects, Araújo declared that the government did not intend to abandon the concept of South America but wanted it to be both pragmatic (in the sense of "economic openness") and democratic (ARAÚJO, 2019c). Based on these values, he stressed Brazil's commitment to Prosur, which replaced Unasur (ARAÚJO, 2019c). Unlike the treaty-based Unasur, Prosur was founded by a declaration (Declaration of Santiago), which attests to its flexible nature and vague institutionalization. Accordingly, it was during a side meeting at the General Assembly of the UN, in New York, that Prosur members defined the guidelines of the new regional project (BRASIL, 2020b).

Prosur only welcomes South American democracies and sets six thematic working groups: infrastructure, energy, health, defense, security and fighting crime, and disasters (BRASIL, 2020b). Support from the Washington-based Interamerican Development Bank (BID-INTAL) was agreed to for setting up communication infrastructure (BRASIL, 2020b) so, presumably, there is no concern regarding sensitive information within Prosur members circulating outside the community. It is unclear whether Prosur will keep or overhaul IIRSA.

Bolsonaro's government supports infrastructure projects in general but does not engage in the professional-scientific debate. The prevailing conspiracy approach backed accusations against environmentalists who supposedly worked with leftists, manipulated indigenous peoples and worked to undermine both the current government and Brazilian economic development. In this context, Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy generated a number of controversial and often ridiculed claims (ALMEIDA, 2019; CHAGAS-BASTOS, FRANZONI, 2019).

On the one hand, there are many depictions of Brazil's role in South America in the early 2000s: regional leadership (MALAMUD, 2011), consensual regional hegemony (FONSECA Jr., 1998), benign hegemony (CERVO 2008; REZENDE, 2015), (sub)imperialism (BERNAL-MEZA, 2008; RUSSEL, TOKATLIAN, 2011). On the other hand, the current political leadership addresses the issue in a totally different way, which is likely to generate

confusion and misperception in the region. The practical consequence of an anti-globalist Brazil is the possibility of leaving or weakening Mercosur, as happened with Unasur. However, the cost of leaving Mercosur is relatively high, since some treaties are deeply enmeshed with national norms, such as the Brazilian foreign trade system, which was built on treaties and norms regulating the bloc's customs union.

From 2001 to 2008, more and more members of the Brazilian foreign policy community believed that Mercosur should not remain a customs union. Instead, they believe it should allow Brazil to negotiate free trade agreements without consulting other members of the bloc (SOUZA, 2009). There was a serious debate about it hinging on the aforementioned pragmatic interests in autonomy, security and development. In contrast, Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy hardly addresses these issues. Araújo focuses on the realm of ideas: “the real battle for the future of the world does not take place in the realm of natural resources, or trade, or military power, but rather in the realm of words” (ARAÚJO, 2018b). He claims to be pragmatic in addressing real facts while rejecting cultural Marxism, which allegedly prevailed in Brazilian foreign policy since the 1990s. (ARAÚJO, 2019a, 2019b). Regarding practical and fairly objective interests (RICUPERO, 2017; CERVO, 2008), Araújo's conception of pragmatism contrasts with almost all the epistemic and foreign policy communities in Brazil.

Some critics say there is hardly any foreign policy at all (ALMEIDA, 2019; CHAGAS-BASTOS, FRANZONI, 2019). In sum, the Brazilian regional goals are vaguely defined as building flexible South American integration programs with democratic partners towards economic liberalization and infrastructure connections. The prevailing “pseudo-academic and conspiracy ideas” motivated analysts to depict the current Brazilian diplomacy as “dumb giant” (CHAGAS-BASTOS, FRANZONI, 2019), “schizophrenic” (ALMEIDA, 2019) “disconnected from reality”, and “lunatic fringe” (RICUPERO, 2019). Most International Relations scholars lack the proper psychiatric terminology (e.g. Dunning-Kruger effect) to depict the personal features and the beliefs of the current political leadership so they find it hard to make sense of Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy.

6. CONCLUSION

For years, Unasur and Mercosur have been instrumental for Brazilian interests in terms of autonomy, development, and security. This paper presented how South American integration initiatives contribute to these pragmatic Brazilian interests.

First, regional institutions facilitated political coordination. By doing so, they strengthened Brazil's bargaining power, particularly when negotiating with more powerful states and blocs. Plus, they contributed to a peaceful environment for economic development. Second, regional integration has been vital for Brazilian companies. South America - particularly Mercosur - has been the most important market for Brazilian manufactured exports. And South American countries have been the first stage of the Brazilian companies' internationalization. Third, regional institutions and trust building measures contributed to Brazilian strategic interests. South America is a primary market for Brazilian arms exports and hosts vital assets for Brazilian energy needs.

These ideas are acknowledged by most members of both the epistemic and foreign policy communities in Brazil. They illustrate the pragmatic foundations of Brazilian interests in the region. Besides the empirical evidence concerning those pragmatic interests, this paper analyzed both the epistemic and foreign policy communities in Brazil to explain the country's previous support for regional integration. Indeed, there is a debate within both communities in Brazil concerning the role of South American integration.

However, such debate is ignored or largely misinterpreted by Bolsonaro's political leadership, who disregard professional and scientific debates about pragmatic interests. Brazilian foreign policymakers under Bolsonaro, especially Ernesto Araújo, did not engage in the practical issues of such debate, mainly, due to the ideological nature of their beliefs, following the New Right anti-globalist movement. Clashing worldviews, assumptions, beliefs, interpretations, motivations, discourse, and actions mark the divide between Bolsonaro's foreign policy on the one side, and previous political leadership, and both the epistemic and the foreign policy communities in Brazil on the other side.

The core beliefs of Bolsonaro's administration assume that South American integration is an ideological and communist endeavor, fundamentally because those core beliefs disregarded both the epistemic and the foreign policy communities. As a result, the concept of Conspiracy-Myth Diplomacy depicts Bolsonaro's approach to South American integration because it is a mythical and conspiracy-oriented foreign policy, based on an anti-globalist assessment of reality and embedded in ideology and bias. This approach has transformed the Brazilian role in the region while ruining Unasur and could have unpleasant consequences for Mercosur. It is still too soon to tell to what extent the new Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos A. França will keep the previous approach. There is an opportunity to include regional integration back into the agenda with the Brazilian temporary presidency of Mercosur, which could support the efforts to become a true Customs Union and a common market with deeper social integration. Another promising research agenda is Mercosur's enlargement in South America and the country member's domestic reaction.

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