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## Foreign Policy and International Relations: Taking Stock after Two Years of the Bolsonaro Administration

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# Foreign Policy and International Relations: Taking Stock after Two Years of the Bolsonaro Administration

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## Introduction

Since its inauguration in January 2019, the government of President Jair Bolsonaro has made a radical change of course in international relations – not only in comparison to the foreign policies of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) governments (2003-2016), but also regarding long-standing paradigms and traditions of Brazilian foreign policy. The core components of this reorientation during the first two years of the Bolsonaro presidency included a strong emphasis on conservative and religiously motivated values in foreign policy discourse, the rejection of multilateral institutions, a turn away from Latin America, and a quasi-automatic alliance with the US administration under Donald Trump.

Foreign policy was not a central topic in the 2018 presidential election campaign, which revolved around domestic issues such as the economic crisis, corruption, public security, and traditional values and customs. Bolsonaro was elected because of a unique confluence of several, to some extent contradictory, currents of the *Zeitgeist* reflected among his main support groups: evangelicals and conservative Catholics, authoritarian-minded members of the military and security forces, and the financial sector endorsing neoliberal economic policies. Those currents also came to be represented by different strands in his cabinet (e.g., Spektor 2018; Del Vecchio and Nozaki 2020). Following the inglorious end of the PT government via the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, in the midst of an economic downturn and major corruption scandals (which, however, did not incriminate Rousseff personally), a strong anti-PT sentiment erupted and found its expression in mass protests against political corruption and in favor of impeachment. Since then, a strong aversion to everything associated with the left has prevailed among conservative sectors of the population, who accuse the left of undermining morality – both public (e.g., corruption) and private, as progressive policies advocated by the left were seen as an attack on traditional family and Christian values. In Bolsonaro's cabinet, this current is represented by the ideologists, or anti-globalists.

Related to this, in reaction to proposals such as the expansion of the rights of sexual minorities (e.g., gay marriage), the legalization of abortion, affirmative action aiming at racial egalitarianism, and the decriminalization of drugs, which were defended and stimulated (though not all implemented) by the PT governments, new forms of social authoritarianism came to the fore. These are expressed in exclusionary reflexes against racial, ethnic, and sexual groups and mi-

norities and a rejection of human rights, which are perceived as protecting the rights of marginalized groups and criminals at the expense of the rights of the “good citizen” (*cidadão de bem*). This perspective often includes favorable attitudes toward law-and-order approaches, a political role of the military, and the glorification of a better past, in particular Brazil’s period of military dictatorship (1964-1985). This current is catered to by the unprecedentedly strong presence of military men in the cabinet and government institutions. Finally, Bolsonaro won over the financial and business sector with his promise of reinforcing neoliberal, free-market capitalism, a tendency represented by the technocrats around Paulo Guedes, a committed neoliberal economist.

The foreign policy credentials of key actors in the government were limited. Bolsonaro himself is a former army captain who served as federal deputy from 1991 to 2018, representing the state of Rio de Janeiro. While in Congress, he was a backbencher and opportunist with a talent for repeating common prejudices who caught public attention with provocative statements. He became known as a vocal opponent of homosexuality and same-sex marriage, abortion, affirmative action, drug liberalization, and secularism, made statements in defense of the Brazilian military regime and argued that torture was a legitimate practice. In doing so, he tapped into sediments of authoritarianism and racism in Brazilian society that have historical roots and have never been overcome (Schwarcz 2019). This made him a polarizing and controversial figure that has been described as far-right, populist, or even fascist. Refuting those who expected him to take a more moderate stance when in office, he has very much followed Trump’s authoritarian playbook of creating crises and trying to disrupt democratic institutions.

While Bolsonaro had no significant international experience and no foreign language skills, his first Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo was a career diplomat. Yet, at the time of his appointment, he was a lower-ranking member of the diplomatic corps who did not have the stature and experience to lead the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, Itamaraty, named after the palace in Rio de Janeiro that it once occupied (Chagas-Bastos and Franzoni 2019). Araújo belonged to the ideological, anti-globalist camp within Bolsonaro’s cabinet. He was strongly inspired by the late Olavo de Carvalho, an eccentric yet influential self-promoted philosopher, political pundit, polemicist, and far-right conspiracy theorist who resided in the United States and communicated with his Brazilian audience via social media (Teitelbaum 2020). Often dubbed the ideologue of Bolsonaro and the Brazilian far-right, de Carvalho allegedly mooted the nomination of Araújo as Foreign Minister.

The purpose of this contribution is to highlight the major new directions in Brazilian foreign policy under the Bolsonaro government, in comparison to what used to be core tenets of Brazil’s international relations. The focus of the text is the 27-month tenure of Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo from January 2019 up to his resignation on 29 March 2021. After describing the main trends, I will offer brief reflections on how to interpret them – in particular, whether Bolsonaro’s foreign policy is exceptional in Latin America, and whether it can be labelled populist.

### **New directions in Brazilian foreign policy under Bolsonaro**

Influential thinkers on Brazil’s international affairs have always emphasized Itamaraty’s centrality in Brazilian foreign policymaking (e.g., Soares de Lima and Hirst 2006; Cervo and Bueno 2015; Mares and Trinkunas 2016). Although occasionally challenged by the President’s will to

play a more visible role, Itamaraty has largely been in charge of steering Brazil's international course, stood out in the region due to its autonomy and its professional and effective diplomatic corps, and also enjoyed high domestic legitimacy. Consequently, Brazilian foreign policy exhibited a series of principles, objectives, and traditions that remained largely unaltered throughout time and across governments of different ideological orientations.

The central tenets of Brazilian foreign policy were strongly influenced by foreign policy concepts created in Latin America, such as developmentalism, dependency, regional integration, and autonomy (e.g., Soares de Lima and Hirst 2006; Birle 2013; Tickner 2015; Guimarães 2020; Kacowicz and Wajner 2021). Developmentalism (*desarrollismo*) evolved as an analytical assessment of the international political economy in the 1950s and 1960s and saw foreign policy as an instrument to foster economic and social development. It was based on the assumption that sovereignty and a strong state were necessary preconditions for overturning the relations between core and periphery that drove underdevelopment. Regional integration served as a foreign policy tool to put this developmental approach into practice, in line with the idea that stronger ties with regional neighbors would buttress the shared quest for autonomy from the North, especially the United States. The concept of autonomy, as elaborated in the work of Juan Carlos Puig in Argentina and Hélio Jaguaribe in Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s, refers to freedom from constraints or one-sided dependence on other states. In Latin America, seeking autonomy is a defensive approach for safeguarding national sovereignty and securing nondependent development (Tickner 2015).

Due to its continental size, however, Brazil's political elites considered the country to be distinct from its South American neighbors and expected it to become an influential player in world politics. Universalism – that is, the intention to reach out beyond Latin America and maintain relations with different world regions – has therefore been a consistent feature of Brazilian foreign policy (Birle 2013; Guimarães 2020). The universalist approach is supported by Brazil's traditional endorsement of multilateral cooperation, with the country playing an active role in international institutions, both at the global and the regional level (Grabendorff 2010a and 2010b; Birle 2013).

Against this background, the following sections assess the changes of course in foreign policy under Bolsonaro, looking especially at the role of the Foreign Ministry, global multilateral cooperation, and regional cooperation. An additional section explores how Brazil's foreign policy is perceived from the outside.

### *Role of the Foreign Ministry*

As mentioned above, Itamaraty has long been considered a model for its high level of professionalization and its capacity to formulate foreign policy strategies. Accordingly, diplomacy was regarded as central to Brazilian foreign policy (Belém Lopes 2020). Brazilian diplomacy traditionally pursued a conciliatory approach and relied on multilateral cooperation. Under the direction of Ernesto Araújo, Itamaraty's professionalism has been damaged and the once autonomous and influential entity relegated to a secondary role (Frenkel and Azzi 2021). It might well have been precisely Araújo's lack of experience that led to his appointment. Indeed, the minister, who has been called "the worst diplomat in the world" (Pagliarini 2019), first and foremost acted

as a political-ideological shield to the President, both at home and abroad (Chagas-Bastos and Franzoni 2019).

The hard-right turn under the Bolsonaro government also put into question the traditional pragmatism of Brazilian foreign policy. The country's actuation on the global stage has since featured a strong ideological discourse attacking "globalism." At the domestic level, this discourse has included a moral crusade against NGOs, particularly environmental groups, human rights activists, and indigenous rights groups, all of which are regarded as "globalist forces" who allegedly want to substitute "pure" national values (namely Christian and family values) with "foreign" norms such as sustainability, gender equality, reproductive rights, the right to abortion, and LGBTQ rights. This moralized discourse has come with a strong anti-communist undertone, indiscriminately labelling all leftist and progressive groups and individuals communists and emphasizing the need to contain communism and "cultural Marxism." In his speeches at the UN General Assembly in 2019 and 2020, Bolsonaro opted to promote his domestic agenda and took a confrontational stance toward his critics both at the domestic and the international level.

The implications of this discourse for Brazil's international presence included a disapproval of multilateral treaties and institutions, recurrent ranting against "international elites" and "international bureaucracies," as well as skepticism toward – and sometimes open attempts to undermine – international norms. Human rights and minority protection in particular are not a priority on Bolsonaro's agenda. Attacks against national and international anti-torture mechanisms, such as the "National Preventive Mechanism Against Torture"; Bolsonaro's encouragement of the use of more lethal force by the police; the weakening of the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), the agency responsible for protecting the interests of indigenous peoples; and the declared intention of opening up indigenous lands to mining and industrial agriculture have placed the Brazilian government in conflict with its international human rights obligations.

Furthermore, Brazilian diplomats were left without instructions on what should be put in place of the norms challenged by the Bolsonaro government and have thus often issued incoherent statements. Brazil's representatives also made headlines with erratic, outrageous, or controversial claims, such as Ernesto Araújo's repeated classification of Nazism as left-wing ideology.

Ideological discourse is often buttressed by conspiracy theories, epitomizing paranoid political leaders who feel that uncontrollable forces in an increasingly complex world work against their nation and its lifestyle. In doing so, "globalism" is conceived as a series of plots carried out by international agencies and leftist governments to impose "cultural Marxism." The use of conspiracy theories has been particularly prevalent in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Throughout 2020, the Brazilian President framed the pandemic as a "communist conspiracy" and created narratives around the terms "Chinese virus" and "Chinese vaccine" (Kalil et al. 2021). Another blatant example early in the pandemic was a review of political philosopher Slavoj Žižek's book *Virus* (2020) in Ernesto Araújo's personal blog. Araújo showcased Žižek's work as an expression of a new communist conspiracy, alleging that China and international institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) instrumentalized the pandemic to build "a world order without nations and without liberty" (Araújo 2020). The ideological views articulated by Araújo and Bolsonaro are not free of contradictory assertions when they claim

that communists or “globalists” dominate the world, but simultaneously dismiss communism as a failure (Chagas-Bastos and Franzoni 2019).

#### *Global multilateral cooperation*

Already in the 1970s, Brazil showed visible multilateral engagement within the framework of the North-South agenda and demands for a new world trade order. After the end of military rule, Brazil’s participation in international institutions continued to grow. The concept of autonomy was reenacted with Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010) (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007; Vigevani and Oliveira 2007). The Cardoso government tried to elevate the status of the country and sought, among other things, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Above all, Cardoso wanted Brazil to be accepted into the club of the powerful without insisting on fundamental structural changes in the international system. In contrast, under the Lula government, Brazil adopted a soft revisionist position on the global stage, advocating reforms of the international system without disrupting it. The country used its increasing economic weight to attain a high profile in multilateral organizations and forums. It promoted the foundation of the G-20 and spearheaded the resistance against the United States and the EU on questions of agricultural subsidies during the Doha Round negotiations in the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Grabendorff 2010b). Speaking on behalf of rising powers and the Global South more broadly, Brazil pushed for reforms of the UN system, the world trade order, and international financial institutions to reduce power asymmetries and increase the weight of those countries in the international system.

Under the PT governments, Brazil challenged the traditional structures of the world order through a strategy of autonomy through diversification (Amorim 2010; Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007; Birle 2013). While playing according to the rules, it simultaneously diversified its foreign relations and shifted the emphasis away from traditional partners such as Western Europe and the United States and towards South-South cooperation. The country forged new “minilateral” cooperation forums among rising powers, such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa); strengthened regional alliances; built closer relationships with non-traditional partners in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia; and greatly expanded its number of embassies around the world.

Across various previous governments, Brazil’s multilateral engagement had an impact on important policy areas. Brazil regularly promoted debates about development and poverty as well as about fair trade relations in international forums, acting as an advocate of these issues on behalf of the Global South. Brazil was also at the forefront of pressing environmental issues at the international level. It hosted the UN Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 (which adopted the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) and the follow-up Rio+20 meeting in 2012. Its long-standing pledges to end deforestation made the country a global beacon of environmental conservation and climate resilience.

Much of this has changed under the Bolsonaro government, which made headlines due to its rejection of multilateralism, multilateral institutions, and international treaties. The government has even threatened to leave international organizations and agreements, such as the Paris

Climate Accords or the WHO, and did actually leave some agreements, such as the UN Global Compact for Migration.

In the area of economic development and trade, the current Brazilian government has distanced itself from the countries of the Global South and has been indifferent towards pre-existing South-South and rising power cooperation forums such as BRICS. Advancing debates about problems like development and poverty is no longer a priority. Instead, Bolsonaro's foreign policy has prioritized relations with the United States and the Global North in general, as exemplified by the signature of the EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement and Brazil's attainment of full membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In the area of environmental governance, Brazil has ditched its hard-won position as a global climate leader and joined the group of climate deniers. Bolsonaro rejects the scientific consensus on climate change, and former Foreign Minister Araújo called global warming a plot by "cultural Marxists." During his electoral campaign, Bolsonaro repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the Paris Accords, and once in government he cancelled Brazil's plans to host the 2019 UN Climate Change Conference. The President and many of his cabinet ministers are strong supporters of Brazilian agribusiness and believe that opening new areas of the Amazon region for cattle ranches, agriculture and the timber industry is a recipe for economic growth and poverty alleviation. This includes challenging the protected lands of indigenous tribes. Bolsonaro has angrily resisted foreign pressures to safeguard the Amazon rainforest and has served notice to international environmental non-profit groups that he will not tolerate their agendas in Brazil.

Overall, the Bolsonaro government has been reluctant to engage in multilateral cooperation and has instead shown a strong inclination toward bilateral negotiations with a handful of allies. Bolsonaro's close attachment to former US President Donald Trump, whose positions he copied and imitated many times, was particularly noteworthy. Examples include their emphasis on national sovereignty, fierce rhetoric against international institutions, their intention to leave the Paris Climate Accord, the minimization of the Covid-19 pandemic, accusations against the WHO and China in the context of the pandemic, and their disapproval of the international human rights agenda (and minority rights in particular).

Bolsonaro's foreign policy, however, is often incoherent due to clashes between the government's ideological agenda and its pragmatic interests, especially when it comes to international trade. For example, the exploitation of the Amazon irrespective of environmental concerns alienates Brazil from its trade partners in the Global North. Bolsonaro's standoffs with European leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron over the Amazon wildfires not only brought Brazil much negative attention abroad, but also threaten to block the ratification of the EU-Mercosur agreement, as governmental and societal actors in Europe have demanded putting a stop to deforestation before proceeding with the deal.

Another example is Brazil's ambiguous relation with China. Bolsonaro's frequent negative references to the People's Republic during his presidential campaign and the anti-Chinese conspiracy theories disseminated during the coronavirus pandemic denounced the country as his main ideological adversary and "communist threat" (see Belém Lopes 2020;

Guimarães and Silva 2021; Kalil et al. 2021). At the same time, the fact that China is Brazil's largest trading partner is a strong incentive to maintain friendly relations.

### *Regional cooperation*

Since its re-democratization process, Brazil has fostered cooperation and peaceful relations with its neighbors in the region. In the 1980s and 1990s, the country resolved its long-standing rivalry with Argentina via the construction of several bilateral and multilateral institutions. The foundation of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) in 1991 was one of the outcomes of this bilateral rapprochement.

As part of the diversification of foreign relations and a stronger orientation towards the Global South, Brazilian foreign policymakers over the past two decades emphasized the construction of a "South American option", in the words of Lula's foreign policy advisor Marco Aurélio Garcia. The focus on South instead of Latin America was deliberately chosen, as Brazil saw South America as its natural sphere of interest and envisioned a leadership role for itself in the region. Already during the 1990s, Brazilian governments attempted to expand regional cooperation in South America by proposing a South American Free Trade Area (which was not realized) and regular summits of South American presidents, the first of which took place in Brasília in 2000. This and subsequent presidential summits in the 2000s led to the foundation of the Initiative for the Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure (IIRSA), designed to promote the physical integration of the region, and the Community of South American Nations, later renamed Union of South American Nations (UNASUL), which included all 12 independent South American states. Established in 2008, UNASUL was a political platform that covered various policy areas by means of its sectoral councils, such as the South American Defense Council. Brazil's protagonism in constructing a South American identity via UNASUL as well as its support for other regional cooperation schemes such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), both of which intentionally excluded the United States, can be read as yet another reaffirmation of the principle of autonomy in Brazilian foreign policy (Tickner 2015).

Brazil also played a central role in crisis management in and between neighboring countries, for example in the conflict between Peru and Ecuador (1995), various political crises in Paraguay (1996, 1999/2000 and 2012) and Venezuela (2002 and since 2013), and in Haiti (where it headed the UN stabilization mission from 2004 to 2017). Between the 1990s and the mid-2010s, Brazil developed into an advocate and defender of democracy, spearheading the enforcement of regional democratic norms (Burgess and Daudelin 2007).

In contrast, the Bolsonaro government has loosened Brazil's ties with its neighbors and disregarded Latin America as a region of reference. Instead, Brazil uncritically aligned with the United States under Trump. An example of this was Brazil's support of the unprecedented election of the US candidate Mauricio Claver-Carone as president of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which had until then always been led by a Latin American. Starting with the election of center-left President Alberto Fernández in Argentina in 2019, Bolsonaro has shown a confrontational attitude towards Brazil's former Southern Cone ally, bringing Argentine-Brazilian relations to their lowest point since the period of military dictatorships in the 1970s.

The “De-South Americanization” of Brazil (Frenkel and Azzi 2021) is further exemplified by the government’s disengagement from regional organizations. Bolsonaro’s position toward Mercosur, the organization that most embodied Brazil’s strategic association with Argentina, shifted somewhat over time: While he first considered it irrelevant and threatened to leave it, he later adopted a more utilitarian and commercialist vision, using Mercosur as an “à la carte” platform to adopt trade agreements. The celebrations of Mercosur’s 30th anniversary in 2021 saw exchanges of reprimands between the presidents of the bloc’s member countries, for example when President Fernández proposed the creation of an observatory of democratic quality and another one on the environment, two uncomfortable themes for Bolsonaro.

It is fair to say that UNASUL was already in a state of crisis before Bolsonaro’s election in 2018. The organization had been damaged by ideological confrontations and polarization among its members, as well as the failure of its various attempts to resolve the Venezuelan political crisis. Brazil played an ambiguous role in this respect. While supportive of multilateral crisis management initiatives by the Organization of American States, UNASUL and Mercosur, the PT government for too long endorsed the fellow leftist Venezuelan regime under Hugo Chavez (1999-2013) and Nicolas Maduro (since 2013), although it was increasingly obvious that its presidents undermined democratic institutions, repressed the opposition, and steered the country onto an autocratic path.

UNASUL reached an impasse in April 2018, when it was unable to appoint a new Secretary-General and the disaffected governments of Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Paraguay suspended their participation. As a regional power, Brazil could certainly have revitalized and reformed UNASUL, had it wanted to. Yet, the Bolsonaro government later confirmed Brazil’s withdrawal and employed anti-communist rhetoric to denounce the organization as a “Bolivarian” and socialist regional initiative promoted by Venezuela and the PT governments. Subsequently, the Brazilian government also withdrew from CELAC.

Joining the Pacific Alliance was at some points proposed as a better alternative, but no concrete steps in this direction have so far been taken. Nor did Bolsonaro show much interest in the Forum for the Progress of South America (PROSUL), the body set up in 2019 under the auspices of Chile and Colombia in replacement of UNASUL. Regarding Venezuela, Bolsonaro aligned with Trump’s strategy of putting pressure on Maduro and initially even supported the idea of a military intervention, marking a radical deviation from the traditionally upheld principle of non-intervention. While the Brazilian president’s more determined stance towards Maduro is viewed positively by Western diplomats, his polarizing anti-communist rhetoric and the invocation of the Venezuelan example in the domestic electoral campaign (arguing that a PT victory would “turn Brazil into Venezuela”) contributed to the politicization of regional debates about Venezuela and have thus been counterproductive for resolving the crisis. Brazil also played a secondary role in the Lima Group, an informal body created in 2017 to mediate the crisis in Venezuela.

While it is true that regional cooperation in Latin America has always been fragile and worked best when the leading countries were ruled by ideologically like-minded presidents, Bolsonaro’s indifference and dislike of regional organizations not only reinforced pre-existing

disintegrative tendencies in regional cooperation, they fundamentally questioned its continuity (Nolte and Weiffen 2021).

#### *Perception from the outside*

Starting in the mid-1990s, Brazil, the South American giant, began to be identified by academics, pundits, and policymakers from other countries, especially its partners in Europe and North America, as an emerging power, a rising power, a middle power, or a regional leader (Soares de Lima and Hirst 2006; Guimarães 2020). Although the various role conceptions of Brazil becoming a global player, being one of the new emerging powers, acting as an advocate of the developing world or establishing itself as a regional leader in South America were to some extent contradictory and could not all be fulfilled at the same time (Grabendorff 2010a; 2010b), Brazilian diplomats firmly incorporated them into the official discourse.

In the Bolsonaro period, Brazil has gone from being a reliable partner to a “global pariah” (Brum 2021), with Brazilian foreign policy experts sarcastically referring to it as the “dumb giant” (Chagas-Bastos and Franzoni 2019). Former Brazilian diplomats and foreign ministers from different governments have denounced Brazil’s foreign policy under Bolsonaro as irrational and a disgrace, one which has caused more damage to the country’s international status and prestige than any other period in history and has led to its isolation in the region and in the world (Chagas-Bastos and Franzoni 2019; Mello 2020). International press coverage has become increasingly negative, and Brazilians regularly find their country described as a global threat – in 2019 due to the burning of the Amazon Forest and in 2020-21 due to the uncontrolled spread of Covid-19 and the emergence of a new virus variant in the country.

#### **Contextualizing Bolsonaro’s foreign policy**

As mentioned above, quintessential elements of Latin American foreign policies have traditionally included the use of foreign policy as a development instrument; an emphasis on the need for more autonomy, especially in relation to the United States; and the importance of Latin American integration and stronger South-South ties (Kacowicz and Wajner 2021). In this respect, the new directions taken under the Bolsonaro presidency seem to be a deviation from regional traditions. Nevertheless, the main components of Bolsonaro’s foreign policy – including his alignment with the United States, his anti-communist and anti-liberal rhetoric, as well as his populist claim of protecting the “true people” against foreign forces – are not new to the region either, although those positions were typically adopted by conservative or even authoritarian governments (De Moraes 2020).

The question of whether Bolsonaro fits into the long tradition of Latin American populism, in which a leader aspires to embody the true people’s will against domestic and foreign foes, remains controversial. The construction of an “us vs. them” antagonism between two camps – the people and corrupt (foreign) elites – is a defining element of populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Populists convey a dichotomic, polarized view of society and use moralistic indignation, politics of fear and conspiracy theories to mobilize their supporters and portray their opponents as enemy images. Populist rhetoric and politics are also characterized by anti-pluralism, anti-

liberalism, and the endorsement of authoritarian values (Müller 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017).

These elements of populism are certainly present in the Bolsonaro government and are reflected in its foreign policy (Jenne 2021; Guimarães and Silva 2021). Bolsonaro's anti-globalist stance has found expression in the dislike of liberal international institutions and a rejection of global norms and their advocates. Government officials have advanced nationalist positions, claiming to protect the nation against real or imaginary external enemies or ideological adversaries. Their main ideological adversaries such as Cuba and Venezuela have been consistently targeted with anti-communist slander, whereas the attitude towards China (an ideological adversary, but also an important trading partner) has been more inconsistent.

These populist features notwithstanding, Bolsonaro deviates from classical Latin American populism, which focused mostly on socio-economic issues and the inclusion of poor, marginalized groups. Instead, as Bolsonaro's close alignment with Trumpism suggests, his populist ideology is akin to exclusionary forms of populism that seek to protect the middle class from elite conspiracies and outside forces and that have traditionally been more widespread in Europe and North America. Bolsonaro's rise therefore might not signal the advent of a new wave of far-right populism in Latin America, but rather form part of a global populist-nationalist-authoritarian backlash against the international liberal order.

### **Conclusions and outlook**

This chapter has presented an overview of the reorientations in Brazilian foreign policy under Bolsonaro, focusing on the first two years of his term in office. This period ushered in a farewell to core tenets of Brazilian foreign policy, Itamaraty's professionalism and pragmatism, Brazil's strong international presence and protagonism on the global and the regional stage, and its favorable external perception. These principles and traditions have given way to a confrontational and ideological approach. Even if one does not share the critics' harshest assessments of Bolsonaro and Araújo's foreign policy as "crazy" or "a disgrace" and may object that the PT government was not free from ideological tendencies either (as its unwavering support for the regime in Venezuela demonstrated), in view of the frequent incompatibility of ideology and interests, one cannot classify Bolsonaro's foreign policy as anything other than incoherent.

Yet, two major changes that occurred in early 2021 could potentially steer Brazil's foreign policy in a different direction. First, with Trump's defeat in the 2020 US presidential elections, Bolsonaro lost a political role model whom he frequently emulated and with whom he was eager to forge close bilateral ties. Joe Biden's victory and Bolsonaro's long reluctance to recognize it cast a dark cloud over US-Brazilian relations. Biden is likely to take a tougher stance on Brazil in areas such as the environment and human rights, leaving Bolsonaro more isolated on the global stage. Ironically, the cooling of relations with Washington could push Bolsonaro closer to China. Despite his anti-China rhetoric, he might come to rely more on Brazil's largest commercial partner if environmental and human rights issues hamper the expansion of US-Brazilian trade relations.

Second, Araújo had to resign from his post as Foreign Minister on 29 March 2021 under pressure from diplomats and lawmakers accusing him of doing serious harm to Brazilian inter-

ests. While Araújo's embrace of far-right ideas and conspiracy theories endeared him to other far-right governments around the world, particularly the Trump administration in Washington, he failed to deliver tangible results for the Brazilian people and left the formerly autonomous and respected Itamaraty in ruins. His resignation and the simultaneous dismissal of defense minister Fernando Azevedo e Silva, followed by the resignation of the heads of all three branches of the armed forces, were indications of a crisis of the Bolsonaro presidency in 2021, which was facing growing domestic anger over its catastrophic mismanagement of Covid-19.

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