Brazil amid international turmoil

Organizers: Bernardo Sorj and Sergio Fausto

Presentation: Celso Lafer

Authors:
Adriana Abdenur
Antonio Ruy de Almeida Silva
Fernanda Magnotta
Gelson Fonseca
Guilherme Casarões
Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida
Maria Regina Soares De Lima
Marianna Albuquerque
Rubens Ricupero

PLATAFORMA DEMOCRÁTICA
FUNDAÇÃO FHC
CENTRO EDELSTEIN
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Plataforma Democrática (Democratic Platform - https://www.plataformademocratica.org) is a Fernando Henrique Cardoso Foundation and Edelstein Center for Social Research initiative dedicated to strengthening democratic culture and institutions of Latin America through the pluralistic debate about social and political transformations within the region and around the world.

Directors: Bernardo Sorj and Sergio Fausto

Proofreading: Alice Noujaim
Graphic Design and Layout: Felipe Martins

São Paulo: Edições Plataforma Democrática, 2025

Brazil amid international turmoil / organized by Bernardo Sorj, Sergio Fausto. – 1st ed. – São Paulo: Edições Plataforma Democrática, 2025.

Various authors.
Available at: https://fundacaofhc.org.br
ISBN 978-65-87503-66-0

1. Brazil – Geopolitics. 2. International relations. 3. Human rights. I. Sorj, Bernardo. II. Fausto, Sergio. III. Title.

CDU: 327(81)

Jéssica Almeida – Librarian – CRB-8/10593

Table of Contents

Presentation

The purposes of this publication, which I am pleased to present, are very well articulated by Bernardo Sorj and Sergio Fausto, who, together, led and organized this endeavor.

The project is aligned with the FHC Foundation's objectives and activities, which is always committed to analyzing and discussing the major issues on Brazil's national agenda. Nothing is more pressing at the moment than assessing the incisive transformations of the international system and their significant impact on Brazilian life.

With this in mind, the organizers of this publication mobilized qualified contributors, knowledgeable about international relations, who responded to the same set of questions from their diverse perspectives. They dedicated themselves to facing a challenge that marks the work and legacy of FHC, as he was, as Weffort described him, the sociologist of relations *in fieri*, of formations "*in the* making," of changing interactions, and in this context, "*della cosa a fare*," to indicate direction and meaning.

The intensity of change is the new international scenario. This new scenario has been undermining the previous and more usual patterns of acceptable and predictable logic that guided the assessment of risks and opportunities in the conduct of countries' foreign policy. The erosion of these patterns has multiplied uncertainties and the unexpected. Hence the difficulties

in knowing what to stick to in dealing with Brazil's international insertion in the world. Knowing what to stick to, in a world of which we are a part in our specificity, guides the authors' indications.

The responses gathered in this publication "are largely convergent, but the nuances are important," as the organizers point out. Hence a certain plurality of emphases and perspectives in the analyses of paths and issues. Underlying them is the perception that, for Brazil too, the prospective scenario is one of events closer to the challenges of the Cape of Storms than to the expectations of the Cape of Good Hope.

This is the result of the diffuse tensions of power in international life that permeate the latitudes and longitudes of the world machine.

I am referring, of course, to the tensions of the dispute for hegemony at the heart of the international system, as well as their ramifications in the tensions of balance in regional spheres. These tensions are diffuse, take various forms and modalities, and intensify conflicts in the dynamics of changing circumstances. They have been occurring in the new kaleidoscope of geopolitics, which I outline below.

In fact, the renewed perspective of geopolitics, with its focus and emphasis on the control of spaces, inputs, raw materials, and narratives, is now a component of the Hobbesian intransitivity of international conflicts. It impacts the military-strategic, economic, values, and environmental fields.

In the strategic-military field—which concerns what a country means to others as an ally, protector, or enemy on the horizon of a war situation—the changes are significant. The previous balances and their norms, built after World War II, have lost their effectiveness, including the logic of nuclear deterrence and the principle of preserving the territorial integrity of nation-states. This is what makes international security precarious and makes the management of peace and war even more elusive, opening up new space for the "rise to extremes" and the march of folly. The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are illustrations of this.

The economic field of international resource transfer concerns the role of one country to others as a market for the import and export of products, and access to financing and investments. In this field, the negotiating logic of economic reciprocity of interests is losing ground and being replaced by geoeconomics. In this, the unilateralism of states concerned with their *security in the broad sense* prevails. This is what leads to managed trade. The decline in the importance of the World Trade Organization and its rules is an illustration of this.

The field of values concerns the affinities or dissonances between countries related to ways of conceiving life in society.

This issue entered the international agenda after World War II, due to normative aspirations fostered by a policy of law, which has as *its guiding principle* the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is an aspiration enshrined in the 1988 Constitution.

Today, the agenda of normative aspirations faces difficulties brought about by the rising tide of authoritarianism and its clash with democratic values. We do not have many partners in this matter of values, as we did at the 1993 Vienna Conference, which succeeded in affirming the universality, indissolubility, interdependence, and interrelatedness of the entire spectrum of human rights. It is not an item of relevance to the expanded BRICS and many members of the axiological heterogeneity of the Global South.

Finally, to conclude this illustrative overview of the dynamics of the world machine, I refer to the field of the environment. It is the most cross-cutting of fields, as it concerns the conditions for the survival of human life on earth, which depends on the preservation of the ecosystems that, together, on a planetary scale, sustain it.

Facing this challenge requires making the multilateralization of interests a permanent feature of a comprehensive reason for humanity. The comprehensive reason for humanity that was present at Rio-92 does not find much space in the current functioning of the world machine.

It is within the framework of the changing relationships outlined above that the important contributions of this publication are inserted.

Celso Lafer
President of the Board of Trustees of the FHC Foundation

Introduction

Disciplinary specialization has its reasons for being, beyond the defense of the corporate space of its practitioners. In the case of the separation between the fields of study of international relations, sociology, and political science, the theoretical justification is that the first discipline has as its object the system of states, guided by national interests in a system with few rules and, ultimately, sustained by military and economic power. Sociology and political science, on the other hand, study societies built around institutions, norms, and the legitimacy of constituted power.

While the separation may be justified, we cannot forget how detrimental it is to the understanding of their own objects of study. National societies cannot be explained without reference to their relative place in the international system. And a country's foreign policy cannot be reduced to an abstract "national interest," as the form of internal legitimation impacts foreign policy guidelines. Nazism and fascism were extreme cases, but the interfaces are always present, as shown by the various "internationals"—the communist in the past and, currently, the far-right networks[1].

This is not to say that there is a straight line between forms of internal legitimacy and countries' foreign policy. The mecha-

1. The relationship between national societies and geopolitics is analyzed by Danilo Martuccelli in 'A social cartography of the contemporary world', available for free access at: https://fundacaofhc.org.br/publicacao/uma-cartografia-social-do-mundo-contemporaneo/

nisms and rules of the game that legitimize power within society are different from those that govern the international system. But both influence each other and are historical phenomena: both internal power mechanisms and international politics are constantly changing, creating new configurations.

We are living in a historic moment in which the international system and the internal political dynamics of nations are undergoing profound transformations, producing uncertainties that require a broad debate on the challenges facing Brazil's foreign policy. The international system built after World War II—within which Brazil was inserted—had as its cornerstone the United States, confident in its economic power reflected in its GDP and the importance of international trade, the role of the dollar, and its military power, being the only power with global military reach.

This new international order was structured around the United Nations, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as its horizon and respect for the territorial integrity of member states as its main practical principle. The system was supported by a variety of institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the World Health Organization.

It was an international order that assumed rules applicable equally to all states, albeit imperfectly. These rules existed within two large blocs, with their principles applied more fully within the so-called Western bloc and to a limited extent within the so-

called Soviet bloc. Until the fall of the USSR, the world lived under the shadow of the Cold War between the hegemonic powers of each bloc—the Soviet Union and the United States—which, when they deemed it necessary, disregarded national sovereignty and established alliances of convenience with a wide variety of regimes. It was a division into blocs, each promoting a narrative of a desirable world: the USSR, the communist regime, and the United States, liberal democracy. Despite its limitations, this system ensured peace and prosperity in most countries. Wars were localized and did not lead to permanent occupation or border changes. Humanitarian aid, although insufficient, made it possible to tackle famines, support masses of refugees, implement vaccination policies in deprived regions, and tackle epidemics.

This system suffered its first shock with the end of the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, the international system seemed to be consolidating under US hegemony. The number of democracies in the world increased and world trade expanded. The arrival of the internet heralded the democratization of forms of communication and access to information.

Certainly, there were clouds in the sky that indicated changes that could eventually produce storms. The September 11, 2001 attacks produced insecurity and strengthened prejudices against different cultures. Economic globalization led to the transfer of companies—and sometimes entire industrial sectors—from central countries to countries with cheaper labor, especially in Asia and Eastern Europe, destroying jobs and weak-

ening labor unions, which had been central to the construction of the welfare state. The self-confidence of the dominant economic groups was expressed in policies that modified the distribution of the tax burden, seeking to reduce spending on social policies, increasing inequalities and social unrest.

But the main development was the rise of China, which integrated market mechanisms and quickly came to occupy a central place in the international economic order, surpassing the United States as the largest exporter of goods in 2009 and projecting itself as a global power. Its economic power was accompanied by growing military power and a foreign policy different from that of the United States. While the US relied on private foreign investment by its companies and its cultural and political model, China—an authoritarian country with a strong state presence in the economy—adopted a foreign policy marked by a long-term perspective, in which state economic resources, often associated with companies, play a central role.

Discontent with the international system began to spread to the domestic sphere of democratic societies in advanced countries. The gains from economic growth during this period were distributed unevenly, widening the gap between rich and poor, and the economic crisis of 2007/2008 hit broad sectors of society, increasing mistrust in the "system" and in the narrative of the elites and traditional political parties. The internet proved to be a contradictory phenomenon, as it began to be used by extremist groups to poison the population with fake news.

When widespread social unrest emerges—for various reasons, but especially for those indicated above—it creates space for the emergence of political forces capable of channeling it. There is no direct relationship between the reasons that cause social unrest and the narrative that mobilizes popular support. The role of political narratives is to unify broad sectors of the population around a common enemy, whose defeat will supposedly allow the people to regain their stolen protagonism.

With national variations, authoritarian political forces have reemerged, adopting a xenophobic nationalist discourse. Xenophobic nationalism, a phenomenon with a long history, generally associated with authoritarian regimes and, more recently, with illiberal regimes—which progressively undermine the institutional system that ensures the balance of powers and the free expression of minorities—has regained strength. The problem becomes geopolitical when the rise of aggressive nationalist governments affects countries with military power capable of destabilizing regions or world peace—as is currently the case with the United States, China, and Russia. The former, still the world's leading power, sees its hegemony challenged by China; Russia, for its part, relies on its enormous nuclear power to try to regain control of territories of the former Soviet Union.

All of them question the international order built after World War II—including the United States, its main architect. The current U.S. administration has decided to abandon the narrative that, despite its contradictions and practical setbacks, has guid-

ed the country's foreign policy since World War II: respect for human rights, liberal democracy, established borders recognized by the United Nations, and the role of its organizations.

The new US stance reflects a loss of relative power in the international arena, but also internal transformations within its society. The extent to which this new international policy is intertwined with its internal transformations and the rise of authoritarian tendencies requires a more detailed analysis. What interests us here is to emphasize that we are facing a profound destabilization of the international system, associated with internal political transformations in the main global power, calling into question its own democratic future.

If the postwar international system already had dysfunctions and limitations, the current crisis does not signal that it will be replaced by more effective multilateral institutions. The scenario projected for the near future is a multipolar or multinodal system, in which each country will seek to advance its interests, including through the use of military force. This carries enormous risks and hinders the advancement of agendas that require the building of global consensus, such as the climate crisis and the use of artificial intelligence.

This book seeks to identify clues about the geopolitical challenges that Brazil must face in defending its national interests—including the values enshrined in our Constitution: respect for human rights and national sovereignty, but also the defense of its democratic institutions. To this end, we sent a question-

naire to several experts on the subject, with diverse intellectual and ideological positions, as part of the FHC Foundation's effort to promote a pluralistic debate of ideas and the formation of informed public opinion.

The experts' responses presented below are largely convergent, but the nuances between them are important. They agree that, in the face of polarization between the United States and China, Brazil should maintain a pragmatic stance, defending multilateralism and avoiding automatic alignment. This is a context that offers both new opportunities and risks, as increased polarization will lead to pressure for greater alignment. This situation tends to generate tensions, considering China's growing importance as an economic partner and the central role of the United States from a geopolitical and military standpoint.

Although everyone recognizes the importance of the BRICS as a space for Brazil's projection on the international stage, some authors express concern about the central place occupied by China, the internal heterogeneities of the group, and its expansion, which dilutes Brazil's relative importance and strengthens countries with authoritarian regimes.

Experts advocate maintaining Brazil's traditional position of defending human rights and non-intervention, safeguarding the affirmation of this principle in international forums. In the Latin American context, they propose that Brazil act to facilitate negotiated solutions in situations of violation of democratic institutions.

These and other topics—such as climate negotiations and the impact of international transformations on internal political dynamics—are analyzed clearly and concisely by the authors. We believe that promoting an informed and pluralistic debate on major global and national issues—such as climate change, artificial intelligence, geopolitical transformations, and the strengthening of democratic institutions—is essential to overcoming the destructive polarization that erodes democratic life and prevents the development of proposals for Brazil's future.

Bernardo Sorj and Sergio Fausto
Directors of the Democratic Platform

Adriana Abdenur is co-chair of the Global Fund for a New Economy (GFNE). Between 2023 and 2025, she served as Special Advisor to the President of the Republic. She is co-founder of the think tank Plataforma CIPÓ.

1 How much room for maneuver does Brazil have and what are the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

AThe current reconfiguration of the international order—marked by the erosion of multilateral institutions, the emergence of new power centers, and the fragmentation of global value chains—poses unprecedented challenges and, at the same time, offers opportunities for countries in the Global South. The intensifying rivalry between the United States and China is a central source of tension in this context, directly affecting the room for maneuver of countries such as Brazil. Managing this situation requires a pragmatic, strategic, and proactive foreign policy that avoids the trap of automatic alignment with any of the major powers and prioritizes national interests based on autonomy, multilateralism, and bridge-building.

There are at least three structural factors that restrict Brazil's room for maneuver. The first is the asymmetry of power. Brazil is not a central player in the hegemonic dispute between the US and China, and its ability to influence the course of this confrontation is limited by its smaller economic, technological, and military projection. The second obstacle concerns economic dependence: China is now Brazil's largest trading partner, especially in the export of commodities such as soybeans, iron ore, and oil, while the US continues to play a significant role in investment, technology transfer, and cooperation on security issues. The third factor is the fragmentation of the international system itself, which has weakened multilateral spaces—such as the World Trade Organization and the UN Security Council—in which Brazil has historically sought to exert influence proportional to its regional and global weight.

Even so, this same scenario opens windows of opportunity. The first concerns the possibility of sustaining an autonomous foreign policy that rejects automatic alignment and seeks selective engagement with both poles. The Lula administration, for example, deepened relations with China through trade, investment, and technological cooperation agreements, while avoiding joining the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), unlike other countries in the region—signaling a stance of selectivity and caution. Second, there is room to diversify partnerships and reduce structural vulnerabilities. Strengthening ties with Europe, Africa, Latin America, and other emerging countries, such as India, Indonesia, and South Africa, can expand Brazil's strategic autonomy. Finally, forums such as BRICS+ and the G20 continue to offer space for multivector

diplomacy, in which Brazil can act as a mediator and influence key agendas for the future of global governance, from climate to trade, from financial architecture to artificial intelligence.

In this scenario, defending the national interest requires a strategy articulated on several fronts. Maintaining equidistance between the poles of power—understood not as passive neutrality, but as a range of strategic calibration—allows Brazil to adapt its actions according to international dynamics. In trade, for example, the relationship with China has been an important counterweight to fluctuations and tensions with the US, as was evident during the tariff disputes over soybeans. On issues of peace and security, Brazil has been testing unprecedented collaborations with China, such as in the attempt to mediate the war in Ukraine, without giving up dialogue with Washington and Brussels.

At the same time, it is essential to reinforce the value of the Global South as a political and normative space. This implies not only building coalitions with other developing countries, but also proposing reforms to the multilateral system that better reflect the current distribution of power and global needs. Brazilian leadership on issues such as energy transition, combating hunger and poverty, and regulating artificial intelligence (AI)—all of which have cross-cutting impacts—expands the country's diplomatic capital and strengthens its international legitimacy.

Finally, Brazil's international integration must continue to be anchored in universal values such as equity, cooperation, solidarity, sustainability, and respect for human rights. In a world increas-

ingly marked by geopolitical rivalries, this stance can help prevent isolation, strengthen partnerships, and expand the scope of action of a country that, although not a superpower, has an important role to play in building a more just and inclusive international order.

2 What impact can participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

Brazil's participation in BRICS+, especially at a time of growing fragmentation of the international order, represents one of the most strategic bets of current Brazilian foreign policy. In times marked by intensifying rivalry between the United States and China and the erosion of traditional multilateral institutions, BRICS is consolidating itself as a space for autonomous and constructive action, expanding Brazil's room for maneuver in the international system. Far from constituting an ideological or rigid alliance, BRICS+ offers Brazil a flexible platform, but with political density, to reposition itself as a relevant actor in global governance—not as an aspiring power on the periphery of the G7, but as an articulator of new agendas from the Global South.

The group, whose recent expansion reflects growing dissatisfaction with the G7-led order, has attracted the interest of new countries seeking greater strategic autonomy. This reconfiguration broadens the scope of Brazil's actions and responds to a demand for viable alternatives to the hegemonic logic of Western powers. While previously ignored or treated with skepticism,

BRICS has come to be seen as a direct challenge to the hierarchy of the international system, generating reactions ranging from disdain to explicit hostility—as evidenced by statements from Donald Trump and other conservative leaders. In this environment, Brazil finds in BRICS a space to exercise its diplomatic tradition of autonomy, negotiation, and bridge-building.

Under Lula's third term, the country has adopted a three-pronged strategy within BRICS. First, it continues to push for reforms in existing multilateral institutions, such as the UN Security Council and the IMF quota system, guided by a logic of inclusion and representativeness. Second, it has strengthened the mechanisms already created by BRICS itself, such as the New Development Bank (NDB), which finances infrastructure and sustainable development projects in countries of the Global South without political or ideological conditions. Finally, Brazil has advocated for the creation of new instruments to fill gaps in the current global architecture, such as alternative financial platforms and cooperation initiatives in science, technology, and energy transition.

This action, however, does not mean abandoning other diplomatic fronts. The government has sought to rebalance relations with the European Union—as evidenced by the resumption of negotiations on the Mercosur-EU agreement—and to maintain open institutional channels with the United States, including on sensitive issues such as the environment, human rights, and technological regulation. BRICS, therefore, does not replace

Brazil's traditional integration, but complements it. Its internal plurality—with members that differ in political systems, geopolitical positions, and economic models—is, in fact, a reflection of the new complexity of the international system. Rather than representing an obstacle, this diversity should be leveraged as a strength: a space for convergence around issues central to developing countries, such as economic sovereignty, institutional reform, and climate justice.

Brazil's presidency of BRICS in 2025 will be an important milestone in furthering this agenda. The challenge will be to keep the bloc relevant, cohesive, and proactive, without allowing it to be captured by unilateral agendas or exploited by disputes between major powers. This requires Brazil to engage in active diplomacy based on listening, and mediation and the concrete formulation of alternatives—practices that have historically been part of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' work, but are now more urgent than ever.

Active participation in BRICS+ allows Brazil to expand its autonomy, reposition itself on the international stage, and contribute to more equitable global governance. In a world where traditional spaces are in crisis and pressures for alignment are intensifying, BRICS offers a path toward building a more multipolar, inclusive order centered on the priorities of the Global South—without Brazil having to choose between powers, but rather asserting its own interests and values.

3 Is the concept of the Global South adequate to guide Brazilian foreign policy?

The usefulness of the concept of the "Global South" for Brazilian foreign policy depends less on its geographical accuracy and more on its ability to serve as a strategic lens in an international scenario marked by profound asymmetries of power and interest. Although the term does not designate a fixed region on the map, it expresses a political-economic condition shared by countries historically marginalized in the definition of the rules and practices of global governance. For Brazil, especially under governments that value autonomy and international justice, the Global South can be a powerful tool—as long as it is used with tactical intelligence and without ideological rigidity.

In multilateral forums, the concept takes on special relevance. In negotiations on climate finance, access to green technologies, artificial intelligence governance, or even in debates on international security, Brazil often aligns itself with countries that face structural barriers to equitable participation in the global system. In these arenas, adopting the identity of the Global South allows Brazil to articulate common interests, build thematic alliances, and push for reforms that democratize the current order—whether by expanding the UN Security Council or reforming the international financial system.

This convergence is clearly evident in the stance taken by many developing countries in the face of recent crises. In UN

votes, for example, most of these countries do not automatically adopt the positions of the G7 or the United States, especially on complex issues such as the genocide in Gaza or the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This critical distance reveals the fluidity and autonomy of the Global South, which resists pressure for mechanical alignments, instead defending agendas that take into account its own historical and strategic concerns.

The strength of the concept therefore lies in its potential to generate convergence around common agendas. By adopting language that transcends regional and ideological divisions, the Global South brings together diverse economies—from India to South Africa, from Indonesia to Colombia—around issues that challenge the rigidity of the G7-centered global order. It is a strategic identity, activated in the face of persistent patterns of exclusion, such as disproportionate control of votes in the IMF or the resistance of rich countries to fulfill promises of financing for climate adaptation.

However, the Global South should not become a straitjacket. Brazilian diplomacy, historically marked by "responsible pragmatism," must preserve its ability to act on multiple fronts and in multiple coalitions. Brazil has legitimate interests in deepening ties with developed countries, as shown by the attempt to conclude the Mercosur-European Union agreement or the growing cooperation with the United States on issues such as energy transition. Being part of the Global South does not mean rejecting the North, but rather forming partnerships from a position of autonomy and assertiveness.

This fluidity of the concept is also reflected in the emergence of alternative terms, such as "global majority" or "political South," which recognize both the internal diversity of these countries and the complexity of contemporary alignments. Not every country in the Global South shares the same democratic values, development priorities, or diplomatic approaches. Recognizing these differences is essential so that Brazil does not sacrifice its own values—human rights, effective multilateralism, and sustainability—in the name of automatic solidarity.

Ultimately, the Global South should be seen as a lens rather than a destination. Its usefulness for Brazilian foreign policy lies in broadening margins for action, building bridges between diverse agendas, and repositioning the country as an articulator of more inclusive global solutions. Used with discernment, the concept can strengthen Brazil's voice on strategic issues and legitimize its proposals for a more equitable international order. But its use must always be subordinate to a higher principle: the defense of a national interest that is simultaneously autonomous, supportive, and committed to transforming the global system.

4 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

Donald Trump's return to the US presidency poses a significant challenge to Brazilian foreign policy. More than an ideologi-

cal clash, it is a clash of visions about the international order, the role of Latin America, and the paths to development. Brazil's response should combine strategic pride, pragmatic engagement, and, above all, a renewed commitment to regional cooperation as a shield and a platform.

Brazil's experience with the second Trump administration offers a clear warning: historical ties between Brazil and the US do not immunize the country against unilateral tariffs, diplomatic blackmail, or attempts to fragment Latin America into spheres of influence. By treating the region as a strategic backyard to be manipulated, Trump seeks to promote an agenda based on division, the exploitation of sensitive issues such as migration, and the weakening of multilateral institutions. For Brazil, this stance requires firmness in defending national sovereignty and refusing automatic alignments.

This does not imply a break. Brazil must maintain open channels of dialogue with the US—for economic, environmental, and security reasons—but without accepting impositions contrary to the national interest. Pressures to isolate China, review environmental commitments, or adopt ideologically biased security policies must be responded to clearly and based on the constitutional principles of Brazilian foreign policy: self-determination of peoples, non-intervention, and defense of peace.

In the face of a possible new Trumpist cycle, diversifying partnerships and rebuilding regional integration takes on strategic importance. Brazil cannot face asymmetric pressures alone—nor

should it. History shows that the fragmentation of South America only serves the interests of those who seek to dominate the region through internal divisions. The revitalization of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the strengthening of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and a concrete agenda for cooperation in infrastructure, health, science, and technology are fundamental steps toward building collective resilience. Based on the Belém Declaration, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) offers a new axis of cooperation and, possibly, integration in South America.

More than ever, regional integration must move beyond rhetoric and become public policy. A coordinated South American bloc with its own voice has greater capacity to negotiate with the US—whatever the administration—and to protect its countries from cycles of external instability. In addition, it serves as a platform for alliances with the Global South, expanding the room for maneuver of Brazilian diplomacy in forums such as the G20 and BRICS+.

Finally, Brazil must project a proactive vision of international order, anchored in multipolarity, sustainability, and human rights. Instead of reacting to Trumpism with isolation or submission, the country can lead by affirming values shared with other global actors, including within the United States itself. After all, even in times of polarization, there are opportunities for cooperation on issues such as climate, health, and energy transition.

Pride is not confrontation. And integration is not closure. Brazil must respond to the Trumpist challenge with more Latin Amer-

ica, more multivector diplomacy, and more commitment to a just international order—in which the countries of the South have a voice, a vote, and a real capacity to define their destinies.

5 What should Brazil's position be toward authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

Since redemocratization, Brazilian foreign policy has been based on the defense of democracy, human rights, and sustainable development as normative pillars. This tradition was interrupted under the Bolsonaro administration, when the country began to openly flirt with authoritarian regimes and abandoned its multilateral engagement in human rights. With Lula's return to power, Brazil is resuming a stance that combines firm principles with diplomatic pragmatism, especially in the face of growing political complexity in Latin America.

The region is currently experiencing a democratic decline. Authoritarian practices and the concentration of power are emerging across different ideological spectrums—from Nicolás Maduro's Venezuela to Nayib Bukele's El Salvador. Given this situation, Brazil must avoid both the conniving omission and selective moralism that characterizes the approach of many countries in the Global North. Instead, it must uphold a diplomacy based on the universalism of democratic values, but articulated with the political reality and limitations of foreign action.

The Venezuelan case illustrates this approach well. Unlike the attempt at isolation promoted by governments such as Donald Trump's—which included economic sanctions and support for self-proclaimed opposition leaders— Brazil supported internal negotiations between the government and the opposition, while reiterating the importance of free elections and respect for civil rights. It is a position that seeks to contribute to stability and democratic reconstruction without violating the principle of non-intervention. However, faced with Maduro's refusal to share the minutes of the last presidential elections, Brazil distanced itself from the Venezuelan government, but without breaking relations, which could contribute to instability in the region.

In the case of El Salvador, the Lula administration has also been attentive to reports of abuses and institutional setbacks—such as Bukele's concentration of power and mass arrests with allegations of rights violations. Even so, it maintains diplomatic relations and open channels of dialogue. The goal is to exert constructive influence, avoiding closing doors that could compromise the future of regional cooperation.

This strategy—of engagement without subordination—requires subtlety and consistency. Brazil must reject the binary logic that classifies countries as either "full democracies" or "regimes to be isolated," often according to geopolitical interests. It must also avoid the mistake of remaining silent in the face of violations on the grounds of ideological affinity. On the contrary, the credibility of Brazilian foreign policy depends precisely on its

ability to affirm democratic values in an equitable manner, including with allies.

To this end, the country can strengthen regional multilateral instruments for the protection of democracy and human rights, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the democratic clauses of organizations such as CELAC and Mercosur. In addition, it should support the creation of spaces for monitoring and political dialogue among Latin American countries, aimed at preventing institutional breakdowns and defending fundamental rights.

Consistency with its own constitutional principles—and with its long diplomatic tradition of seeking peace, mediation, and development with social justice—should be the guiding light of Brazil's actions. In the face of emerging authoritarianism in Latin America, Brazil has the opportunity and responsibility to exercise calm, critical, and constructive leadership.

6 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

Yes, the defense of democracy and human rights should occupy a central place in Brazilian foreign policy in the coming decades. In an international scenario marked by the rise of authoritarian forces and the growing erosion of multilateral norms, Brazil has

an opportunity—and a responsibility—to assert itself as an active defender of universal principles. This does not mean adopting an interventionist or moralistic stance, nor does it mean aligning itself with the selectivity of certain Western powers, which often instrumentalize human rights according to their geopolitical interests. On the contrary, it means resuming and updating Brazil's own diplomatic tradition, based on universalism, the promotion of dialogue, and consistency between principles and practices.

Since redemocratization, with the exception of the Bolsonaro period, Brazil has sought to actively integrate itself into international human rights regimes, whether in the inter-American system or in UN bodies. Brazilian diplomacy has stood out for its broad and intersectional approach to rights, recognizing that democracy is not limited to periodic elections, but also includes economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights. In this sense, Brazil can exercise a unique leadership role, articulating the right to development with the promotion of social and environmental justice.

In addition, the country should take on a constructive role in multilateral forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, proposing initiatives that strengthen these spaces and avoiding the risk of ideological capture or institutional paralysis. This action should be guided by active listening, especially to civil society and historically marginalized groups, and by a willingness to recognize its own domestic challenges in terms of democracy and human rights.

Faced with authoritarian transnational networks that feed on misinformation, intolerance, and denialism, Brazil can—and must—collaborate with other countries and non-state actors to build coalitions in defense of democracy, both within and outside Latin America. This is an ethical agenda, yes, but also a strategic one: stronger democracies tend to be more stable, more reliable as international partners, and more inclined to cooperate.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

Yes, but this leadership must be exercised collectively, transformatively, and anchored in the concrete reality of developing countries. Brazil, with its unique biodiversity, relatively clean energy matrix, and relevant geopolitical role, has unique conditions to lead—not as an isolated power, but as the articulator of a plural coalition focused on a just and sustainable transition.

The Lula administration has promoted a renewed climate diplomacy that connects the agendas of climate, development, and social justice. The COP30 conference in Belém will be a symbolic and strategic milestone: not only because of its location in the Amazon, but also because of the possibility of consolidating a "global collective effort" approach that involves governments, civil society, the private sector, and traditional populations. Brazil

proposes reforms to the climate governance system, including more effective forums, such as permanent climate councils or spaces for coordination between finance ministers and development banks.

Domestically, however, contradictions persist. The approval of Bill 2.159/2021—nicknamed by environmentalists as the "devastation bill"—and the push to explore oil in the Amazonian Equatorial Margin show how conservative and extractivist sectors still exert strong pressure on the environmental agenda. However, there are also signs that the country is willing to rebalance this equation, as indicated by the reactivation of the Amazon Fund, the green PAC, and proposals for the strategic use of oil revenues to finance the energy transition. Brazil must defend a vision that reconciles environmental preservation with sustainable development and seek concrete ways to improve people's lives while combating climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and contamination of soil, air, and oceans.

Brazil's leadership, therefore, is not measured only by ambitious speeches at international summits, but by its ability to build convergence between agendas that have historically been treated as opposites: environmental preservation and economic development.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

The rapidly changing international scenario has direct and indirect effects on Brazilian politics and economics, amplifying both challenges and opportunities. In economic terms, Brazil remains exposed to external shocks—such as the war in Ukraine, decisions by the US Federal Reserve, or increasingly frequent climate disasters—that affect key macroeconomic variables such as inflation, exchange rates, and fiscal capacity. Global interdependence limits the government's room for maneuver, requiring strategies for economic resilience and greater productive autonomy, including through green reindustrialization and regional integration.

On the political front, the rise of the global far-right has a direct impact on the domestic environment. The transnational circulation of denialist, misogynistic, and authoritarian narratives fuels radicalized sectors in Brazil, contributing to attacks on democratic institutions and to an increase in political violence, especially against women, Black people, Indigenous people, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. At the same time, the erosion of the liberal international order opens space for reconfigurations: Brazil can take advantage of this moment to strengthen alliances with other countries in the Global South and with progressive actors who advocate for a new, more just and representative global architecture.

An emerging vector that deserves specific attention is the political economy of artificial intelligence. The rapid concentration

of AI capabilities and infrastructure in the hands of a few countries and corporations may deepen technological and economic inequalities between the center and the periphery. If Brazil does not take a firm stance, it runs the risk of becoming merely a passive consumer of foreign technologies—perpetuating its digital dependence, with negative impacts on sovereignty, employment, and social inclusion. Therefore, it is essential to invest in national research and development capabilities, promote regulatory frameworks that prevent algorithmic discrimination, and ensure that the digital transition is guided by social justice criteria. Brazil must coordinate with other developing countries to establish a common agenda for global AI governance, demanding greater transparency, equitable access to data and technologies, and effective participation in the international forums that will shape the planet's digital future.

Antonio Ruy de Almeida Silva is an admiral (retired), holds a PhD in International Relations from PUC-Rio, and is a former director of the Naval War College. He is currently a senior researcher at the Center for Advanced Studies at INEST/UFF, advisor to the Brazilian Navy's Center for Political-Strategic Studies, and a member of GACInt-USP. He is the author of the book *'A diplomacia de defesa na política internacional'* (Ed. Palmarinca, 2018). He has published several book chapters and articles in newspapers and journals in Brazil and abroad.

1 What is Brazil's room for maneuver and the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

AThe growing rivalry between China and the US increases Brazil's strategic "room for maneuver" on the international stage, but with limitations, especially in defense diplomacy.

Applying Robert Gilplin's model of change in international politics, it can be observed that the US, although still the greatest economic and military power, no longer has the same capacity to govern the international system it created after World War II.

The redistribution of economic and military power to actors such as China, coupled with the US fiscal crisis, is creating a systemic imbalance, pressuring the US to readjust its global strategy.

Thus, following historical patterns similar to those of England before World War I and the US itself in the 1980s, the current US administration has adopted measures to reduce the costs of its strategic commitments, such as demanding more defense spending from its allies, retreating from its role as "world police," negotiating with countries such as Russia to weaken the Moscow-Beijing axis, imposing trade barriers, and seeking investments that can contribute to strengthening its economy. In this scenario of imbalance and competition with China, the US needs to adopt a more flexible position with regional powers such as Brazil, which increases the country's room for maneuver. However, issues such as trade tariffs, relations with China, social media regulation, and tensions related to alignment and support for Bolsonaro groups can generate circumstantial friction.

The US sees Brazil as part of the so-called "Western Hemisphere," an idea first expressed by Thomas Jefferson in 1813, which contributed to the establishment of the Monroe Doctrine. This view imposes limits on Brazilian autonomy, especially in the field of defense. Since the beginning of the 20th century, and more markedly after 1945, the US has built a hegemony in defense diplomacy with Brazil, understood as the administration of non-coercive relations in the field of defense between

the two states. Thus, there are numerous defense mechanisms between Brazil and the US, many of which are based on the concept of hemispheric security.

Although the US Southern Command claims that the "hemisphere is under attack," China has generally acted cautiously so as not to challenge the United States militarily in Latin America, in contrast to its assertiveness in the political-economic sphere. Similarly, Brazil maintains a discreet stance in relation to defense diplomacy with China, demonstrating creativity and pragmatism in this field. A recent and successful example of this approach, which demonstrates Brazil's diplomatic skill, was Operation Formosa, carried out in 2024, which brought together US and Chinese troops in military exercises on Brazilian territory.

In summary, competition between China and the US opens up possibilities for Brazil to expand its political and economic autonomy, allowing for greater flexibility in negotiations and agreements on the international stage. However, in the field of defense, this autonomy is limited by US hegemony in defense diplomacy and Brazil's cautious stance. In this sense, to maximize its room for maneuver, Brazil must seek a strategic balance combining political and economic pragmatism with creative defense diplomacy that avoids breaking with established paradigms in this sensitive area.

2 What impact could participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

A positive impact. Brazil's participation in BRICS represents an important axis of Brazilian foreign policy, with multifaceted impacts that reinforce Brazil's projection as an emerging power and global actor.

BRICS is part of the kaleidoscope of Brazilian foreign policy, which has taken on multiple identities at the regional and global levels, contributing to Brazil's greater presence on the international stage. Globally, one of the most important is Brazil's "BRICS" identity. BRICS contributes to the objectives of Brazilian foreign policy to increase Brazil's role in international politics in various strategic dimensions, contributing to greater autonomy for Brazil on the international stage and to the diversification of political and economic partnerships, without alienating traditional partners.

At the multilateral level, BRICS allows Brazil to coordinate with key partners to advocate for reforms in institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations, advocating for greater representation of developing countries. This agenda is in line with Brazil's diplomatic tradition of challenging systemic asymmetries, even if in some cases it faces regional resistance, such as Mexico and Argentina's resistance to Brazil's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Participation in BRICS also strengthens Brazil's image as an emerging power and one of the most important democratic leaders in the Global South, which increases the country's bargaining power in diplomatic negotiations, with repercussions at the regional level. The defense of Argentina's inclusion as a member of the mechanism, later rejected by Javier Milei's government, and the resistance to Venezuela's entry as a partner in the mechanism demonstrate the possibility of strategically using BRICS to balance regional and global influences.

Another strategic dimension of participation in BRICS is economic. Joint action within the mechanism enables the diversification of trade partnerships and economic cooperation. BRICS' New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement are examples of alternative financial mechanisms that contribute to the diversification of funding sources and reduce dependence on institutions dominated by Northern countries.

On the other hand, there are challenges and tensions in Brazil's participation. The US sees BRICS as a counterweight to its hegemony, which generates criticism, pressure, and potential friction with one of Brazil's most important diplomatic partners. Within the mechanism, the power disparity within the bloc limits Brazil's ability to articulate its position, especially in contexts where Beijing imposes its agenda, as was the case with the incorporation of new members, which diluted Brazil's influence in the mechanism.

Despite the challenges, Brazil's participation in BRICS has a positive and multifaceted impact on Brazilian foreign policy. This impact increases autonomy, transcends the economy, and strengthens the country's image as a global actor, defender of inclusive multilateralism, and one of the leaders of the Global South.

3 Is the concept of the Global South appropriate for guiding Brazilian foreign policy?

Yes, as one of several strategic axes that should guide Brazilian foreign policy. The Global South is a polysemic and contested concept in international relations, with multiple connotations that reflect different dimensions of analysis. From a geographical point of view, it can be related to countries located predominantly south of the United States and Europe, many of which share a historical legacy of colonial exploitation or imperialist subjugation. From a political-economic perspective, the concept highlights the structural asymmetries between underdeveloped countries and developed countries in the so-called Global North. Finally, in terms of identity and mobilization, the concept serves as a discursive tool to foster South-South cooperation and collective articulation in multilateral forums, with a view to building a more equitable international order. In summary, the concept of the Global South can be understood as a spatial representation of the economic and social development aspirations of peripheral and emerging countries, based on a geopolitical imaginary that positions

them as important actors in the construction of a more just and egalitarian international society.

This concept is organically aligned with the principles of Brazilian foreign policy, which traditionally defends in multilateral forums both the need for economic and social development in the countries of the South and their greater participation in international decision-making processes. This stance has earned Brazil recognition as one of the potential leaders of the Global South, although it faces strategic competition from powers such as China and India, which also claim this sphere of influence.

Brazil's identity in relation to the Global South is part of a mosaic of identities that Brazil has built over time and that impact its foreign policy. The Brazilian Constitution, in the sole paragraph of Article 4, states that Brazil "shall seek the economic, political, social, and cultural integration of the peoples of Latin America, with a view to forming a Latin American community of nations." This Latin American identity has been leveraged by Brazil's participation in integration mechanisms such as the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Within South America, Brazilian foreign policy has sought to project its South American identity through integration mechanisms such as Mercosur, while the Amazonian identity is gaining increasing relevance in the context of the global environmental agenda, articulated by Brazil in mechanisms such as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO). In addition, Brazil has

been trying to promote, albeit with limited results, a South Atlantic identity through initiatives such as the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone.

In short, the concept of the Global South is one of the cornerstones of Brazilian foreign policy, in symbiosis with other identities that guide this policy. As the largest democracy in Latin America and a bridge between the developed North and the developing South, Brazil occupies a unique position that reinforces its objectives of consolidating its regional leadership, projecting itself as an emerging power, and expanding its influence in the reformulation of international governance mechanisms as one of the leaders of the Global South.

4 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

With pragmatism, prioritizing its long-term economic goals and the preservation of its sovereignty.

Brazil and the US have many shared interests, mainly in the political and economic spheres, based on a bicentennial relationship. Both have an interest in a stable and conflict-free Latin America. In the political sphere, the two countries maintain high-level institutional mechanisms, including in the area of defense. In the economic sphere, the US has consolidated its position as Brazil's

largest direct investor and second-largest trading partner, with the US market being the main destination for Brazilian manufactured exports. The first quarter of 2025 saw a record in bilateral trade flows, with the US maintaining a surplus, reinforcing the economic interdependence between the two nations.

Therefore, Brazil's position in the face of possible more assertive or unilateral stances by the Trump administration should be pragmatic and balanced, favoring diplomatic negotiation as a means of mitigating tensions and neutralizing adverse measures. Brazil's diplomatic tradition, recognized as one of the pillars of its international projection, should be employed to safeguard Brazilian interests without resorting to confrontation. Brazil's importance to the US and the hegemonic dispute with China increase Brazil's room for maneuver. An excessively coercive stance by Washington toward Brazil could further increase Brazil's rapprochement with China, a scenario that politically and economically does not serve US strategic interests.

In this context, one strategy that Brazil can adopt is to maintain a dynamic balance between the two powers, avoiding automatic alignments and deepening the diversification of trade partnerships and foreign investments to avoid significant dependence on either power. Brazil can use the Sino-American competition as an opportunity to strengthen its position as *a global player*, attracting capital and expanding its presence in alternative markets. Furthermore, it is essential that the country intensify its participation in multilateral forums, such as the UN, WTO,

BRICS, IBSA, and G20, reinforcing its image as a moderate actor and defender of an international order based on shared rules.

At the regional level, Brazil should reaffirm its role as a promoter of South American integration and stability, strengthening mechanisms such as Mercosur, ALADI, and CELAC, and taking the lead on issues relevant to the Global South, such as sustainable development, human rights, and democracy. However, this action should be conducted pragmatically, avoiding unnecessary antagonism with Washington. At the same time, the country should move forward with trade agreements, such as the treaty between Mercosur and the European Union.

In short, Brazil's approach should focus on identifying areas of common interest with the US and pragmatically managing the Trump administration's aggressive stances, prioritizing diplomacy and negotiation. Good relations with the US are fundamental for Brazil, which should seek to strengthen them, based on the country's interests, while rejecting automatic subordination and seeking to preserve its sovereignty and decision-making autonomy.

5 What should Brazil's position be toward authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

Pragmatism and balance, not only with authoritarian regimes in Latin America but with all those around the world.

In recent decades, the international system has witnessed the rise and consolidation of authoritarian governments under different political and institutional configurations, as well as the erosion of democratic principles even in states considered to be democracies. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) point out, democratically elected leaders have increasingly resorted to legal mechanisms, often with the endorsement of legislative and judiciary powers, to undermine democracy and gradually move toward authoritarianism, while maintaining a facade of institutional legality. According to the authors, this phenomenon is evident in cases such as Venezuela, Hungary, Russia, and Turkey, and even poses risks to democracies considered to be consolidated, such as the United States with the election of Donald Trump.

Recent episodes that have threatened the maturing process of Brazilian democracy show that Brazil is not immune to the phenomenon cited by the authors. Thus, it is imperative that the Brazilian government adopts a dual strategy: strengthening democracy in Brazilian society while promoting democratic values and human rights on the international stage. However, this promotion should not be understood as an interventionist or dogmatic stance, but rather as a balance between principles and pragmatism.

In the multilateral sphere, Brazil should continue to defend democracy and human rights in international forums and advocate for the inclusion of democratic clauses in regional mechanisms, as has already occurred in Mercosur. However, in bilateral relations, the country should have a foreign policy that seeks

diplomatic dialogue with all states, regardless of their political regime, in line with its constitutional principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, established in Article 4 of its 1988 Constitution.

This pragmatic approach, however, is not absolute. In exceptional situations—whether due to serious and systematic human rights violations or in compliance with resolutions of multilateral organizations to which Brazil is a party—the country may adopt more assertive measures, such as diplomatic sanctions or restrictions on cooperation.

Strategic flexibility is therefore essential for Brazil to preserve its interests without abandoning its commitments to strengthening the international democratic order.

6 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

Yes. The defense of democracy and human rights is a fundamental pillar of Brazil's international agenda, as established in the Fundamental Principles of the Brazilian Constitution. Article 3 enshrines the dignity of the human person, while Article 4, item II, establishes the prevalence of human rights as a guiding principle of Brazilian foreign policy.

Although there is an interdependent relationship between democracy and human rights, there is no universally accepted concept of democracy. The United Nations Human Rights Council has identified some elements that are essential to democracy, such as political participation, freedom of expression and association, and respect for human rights. However, as shown in the Democracy Perception Index report, released in 2025, the majority of the population in nearly a hundred countries considers that the main objective of democracy is to improve the standard of living and well-being of the population.

In this context, Brazil, one of the countries with the greatest social and income inequality in the world and whose democracy has recently been threatened, faces a double challenge: internally, it needs to consolidate its democratic institutions and reduce historical inequalities, while externally, it needs to project itself as a defender of democracy and human rights.

At the global level, Brazil has acceded to the main international human rights treaties and defended the importance of democracy in international forums, with a non-selective and non-politicized approach. The Brazilian government has also sought greater participation in multilateral organizations related to human rights. In 2023, Brazil was elected for the sixth time to the UN Human Rights Council, committing itself to strengthening the mechanism and addressing the structural causes of serious human rights violations.

At the regional level, Brazil is a member of the Inter-Amer-

ican Human Rights System (IAHRS), participating in both the Commission and the Inter-American Court, where one of the seven judges is Brazilian. The Court is currently reviewing more than 50 contentious cases related to the governments of 10 Latin American countries, including Brazil. Reinforcing Brazil's engagement in the IAHRS, in May 2025, the country formalized the candidacy of a national representative to the Inter-American Commission for the period from 2026 to 2029.

Within Mercosur, the democratic clause established by the Ushuaia Protocol (1998) is in force, updated by the Montevideo Protocol for the Defense of Democracy (2011), which is still awaiting ratification by several countries to enter into force. In the area of human rights, Brazil promulgated the Asunción Protocol on Commitment to the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Mercosur in 2010 and has actively participated in the High-Level Meeting on Human Rights of the mechanism, which has nine thematic commissions.

Within the G20, in 2024, Brazil, as chair of the mechanism, achieved a diplomatic success by negotiating a final declaration, approved by all countries, which established the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty and explicitly incorporated the human rights dimension into issues such as migration and artificial intelligence.

In summary, the defense of democracy and human rights has been an important pillar of Brazilian foreign policy. However, consistency between international discourse and domestic

policies will be decisive for Brazil's legitimacy as a global actor in this agenda.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

Leadership, yes, but with pragmatism in relation to ambitious goals.

Since ECO-92, Brazil has consolidated its position as one of the central players in international negotiations on climate and the environment, legitimized by its vast biodiversity, wealth of natural resources, and policies focused on sustainable production.

Starting in 2023, the Brazilian government adopted a two-pronged strategy: re-engaging with the Paris Agreement, including suggesting the creation of a UN Climate Change Council, with the aim of accelerating the implementation of the Agreement; and seeking to mediate the interests of developing countries and the commitments of developed countries in relation to climate and the environment. This strategy aims not only to strengthen multilateral cooperation, but also to prevent or neutralize protectionist measures disguised as environmental arguments, which can harm emerging economies.

On the Amazon issue, Brazil has taken the lead in calling for more resources for the Amazon Fund while revitalizing the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) to coordinate the actions of the eight countries in the region. One of the results was the 2023 Belém Declaration, which establishes a common agenda for sustainable development and combating deforestation, including the launch of the Amazon Alliance to Combat Deforestation. Another Brazilian initiative is the proposal for the global fund "Tropical Forests Forever," launched at COP28, which will be one of the highlights of COP30. This is a global investment fund whose profits are returned to countries that preserve tropical forests and also remunerate investors. COP30, based in Belém, will be a great opportunity for the country to reaffirm its leadership on climate and environmental issues, consolidating initiatives that combine conservation and international financing.

In the context of energy transition, Brazil has been active on multiple fronts. The country became a founding member of the Global Biofuels Alliance, launched on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in New Delhi, and a signatory, at COP28, of the Global Pact for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency. At COP29, Brazil committed to reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by between 59% and 67% by 2035. This "band target," while allowing for greater flexibility in meeting it, is very ambitious and runs the risk of not being achieved. One of the main challenges is to find a balance between energy transition and energy security. The concept of a "just energy transition," advocated by Brazil in international forums, emphasizes the importance of harmonizing the necessary promotion of

clean energy use with reliable and sustainable access to energy to meet society's needs, while also considering social aspects.

In summary, climate and the environment are issues in which Brazil has the necessary conditions to play a leading global role, while adopting a strategic pragmatism. Ambitious goals are important, but they cannot be assumed while ignoring the country's economic, energy, and social reality. It is up to the Brazilian government to find the right balance, ensuring that the pursuit of global leadership in these areas translates into tangible benefits for Brazilian society and the planet.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

The dynamics of Brazilian political and social polarization have deepened in recent years, a phenomenon that tends to be aggravated by changes in the international scenario.

The return of Donald Trump to the US presidency, allied with the owners of large technology companies, coupled with the growth of far-right parties in Europe, is likely to have a direct impact on the national political dynamic. This situation will not only affect the struggle for power, but will also reinforce conservative agendas across the political spectrum, posing structural challenges to democracy and human rights, with particularly adverse implications for the progressive agenda and minority groups in Brazilian society.

Bolsonarism, as the main driver of polarization in Brazil, has gained new momentum with Trump's election, producing three main effects: the perception, on the part of former President Jair Bolsonaro and his allies, that Trump's election legitimizes conservative agendas and authoritarian political practices; Bolsonaristas acting in the expectation that the new US administration will exert diplomatic and political pressure on the Brazilian government and, in particular, on the Federal Supreme Court (STF), with a view to protecting Bolsonaro from possible convictions related to the attempted coup and weakening national regulation of social media; Trump's projection as a potential strategic ally of Bolsonaro supporters for the 2026 presidential elections.

In this context, social media plays a crucial role. By supporting Trump, the owners of digital platforms seek to secure the backing of the US government in their commercial and regulatory disputes on a global scale, while favoring political parties, usually far-right, aligned with US interests and the conservative agenda. Elon Musk's stance exemplifies this phenomenon: in addition to openly supporting far-right parties in Europe, he has already declared on his social network that the Workers' Party will be defeated in the next elections. At the same time, Musk has been fueling a clash with Brazil's Supreme Court Minister Alexandre de Moraes, who is responsible for ruling on cases related to disinformation and the attempted coup. In this clash, he seems to have the support of the Trump administration, which has already signaled the possibility of imposing sanctions against Moraes.

In addition, the strengthening of the far-right in Europe and the influence of leaders such as Javier Milei in Argentina contribute to the development of transnational networks that connect these movements to Bolsonarism. The dissemination of their ideas and narratives, amplified by the social media ecosystem, tends to exacerbate the polarization of Brazilian public debate, posing a substantial risk to democratic stability. Given this scenario, effective regulation of social media platforms emerges as a necessary measure. However, this will be a major challenge, due to opposition from both the companies that own these networks and Bolsonaro supporters, who depend on these spaces to disseminate their narratives and coordinate their activities. Bill 2630/2020, known as the "Fake News Law," remains stalled in Congress, and the approval of a regulatory framework that holds platforms accountable for the dissemination of misinformation becomes more difficult in a context of alliance between Trump and the owners of these platforms.

In summary, the intersection between the dynamics of domestic politics and changes in the international scenario suggests a deepening of political polarization and challenges for Brazilian democracy.

Fernanda Magnotta holds a PhD from the San Tiago Dantas Program (UNESP/UNICAMP/PUC-SP), is the coordinator of International Relations at FAAP and a Senior Fellow at CEBRI. She is an international analyst for CNN Brazil. She was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Southern California and a Global Fellow at the Wilson Center.

1 How much room for maneuver does Brazil have and what are the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

Brazil adopts a strategy of *active non-alignment*, seeking to preserve its autonomy in the face of growing rivalry between the US and China. This means rejecting the binary logic of alignment with one pole or the other, prioritizing a balanced stance, as highlighted by Matias Spektor in his defense of strategic "*fence-sitting* The country sees multipolarity as an opportunity to diversify risks and expand its capacity for action, maintaining open dialogue with both sides.

However, this room for maneuver requires constant refinement. On the one hand, the US expects Brazil to reaffirm its belonging to the Western liberal-democratic order. On the other hand,

China has been Brazil's main trading partner for over a decade and has a strategic presence in sectors such as telecommunications, vaccines, and infrastructure. In this scenario, the challenge is to avoid both instrumentalization by China in BRICS and marginalization by the US, which still views BRICS with growing suspicion.

2 What impact can participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

Participation in BRICS has a dual effect: on the one hand, it allows Brazil to expand its international projection and participate in central debates on reforming the multilateral system and global governance. On the other hand, it presents risks of asymmetry and instrumentalization. The presence of powers such as China and Russia, with agendas focused on preserving domestic power structures and not very compatible with Brazil's diplomatic tradition of defending an inclusive international order, requires caution.

BRICS offers Brazil a platform to catalyze changes in the international system, especially at times of resistance to reform by the West. However, Brazil needs to maintain its autonomous voice within the bloc, not allowing other agendas to dominate the space, as in the case of the expansion of BRICS in 2023, shaped under Chinese influence, or in the de-dollarization agendas, which sound like a direct confrontation with the US.

3 Is the concept of the Global South adequate to guide Brazilian foreign policy?

The concept of the Global South is useful descriptively, but limited as a strategic guide. It helps to signal solidarity among developing countries and to point out gaps in representation in the international order. However, its internal heterogeneity—which places countries with very different capacities and interests in the same basket—makes its practical application controversial.

The case of China is illustrative: although it still faces development challenges, its power and hegemonic ambitions distance it from other countries in the Global South, including Brazil. For Brazilian foreign policy, the Global South can be a space for action, but not a determinative framework. The focus should be on building flexible and functional coalitions based on converging interests, not necessarily on fixed geopolitical identities.

4 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

Donald Trump's return to power rekindles the logic of spheres of influence, in which the US seeks to reaffirm its hemispheric dominance. This may translate into unilateral stances, pressure for automatic alignments, and protectionist policies with a direct im-

pact on Latin American economies—as has already been seen in trade, migration, and environmental issues.

In this context, Brazil must maintain a firm but pragmatic stance. The defense of regional autonomy, Latin American integration, and non-intervention must guide Brazilian diplomacy. At the same time, it is essential to maintain channels of dialogue with Washington, taking advantage of diplomatic openings and resisting the logic of automatic submission. The country must position itself as a moderating actor, with the legitimacy to build bridges between different centers of power.

5 What should Brazil's position be toward authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

Brazil should maintain a stance consistent with its diplomatic tradition of defending democracy, international law, and non-intervention. This means not endorsing authoritarian regimes, but also not adhering to interventionist or isolationist policies.

Criticism of authoritarianism should be made in multilateral forums, based on universally recognized parameters, such as those of the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS). Rather than aligning itself with punitive campaigns led by major powers, Brazil can offer alternatives for mediation, political dialogue, and regional cooperation, as it has done in previous episodes in Haiti, Bolivia, and Venezuela.

6 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

Yes. Democracy and human rights are historical pillars of Brazilian diplomacy and central instruments of its *soft power*. Ignoring them would compromise the country's credibility and weaken its ability to exercise normative leadership in global debates.

At the same time, it is important that this defense not be selective or instrumentalized. Brazil must act consistently, supporting multilateral mechanisms for the protection of human rights and contributing to their strengthening. The emphasis should be on institutional building, intercultural dialogue, and technical cooperation—not on imposing values through unilateral means.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

Definitely. Brazil has comparative advantages, environmental credentials, and a unique geopolitical role in the climate agenda. Its biodiversity, relatively clean energy matrix, and experience with emissions reduction policies (such as combating deforestation) make it a key player.

Setting ambitious goals, in addition to contributing to the fight against the climate crisis, can bring diplomatic, economic, and reputational gains. This expands Brazil's negotiating space on other fronts, improves its position in international trade agreements, and attracts sustainable investments. However, leadership requires domestic consistency—public policies, green financing, environmental enforcement, and the involvement of subnational and private actors.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

The fragmented international scenario, marked by systemic tensions, regional crises, and power transitions, tends to have feedback effects on Brazilian domestic politics. Pressures for alignments, competition for markets, and external shocks (such as wars or global economic crises) directly impact the political environment and the formulation of public policies in the country.

In addition, global issues such as climate change, food security, migration, and digital technology (including artificial intelligence and Big tech regulation) are becoming central to the domestic debate. This may intensify internal political disputes and require greater interinstitutional coordination. The risk of politicization of foreign policy increases, as does the challenge of maintaining a structured, long-term international agenda. On the other

hand, the new context may also be an opportunity to reevaluate the role of professional diplomacy and the state as a strategic formulator of foreign policies connected to national interests.

Gelson Fonseca, a career diplomat between 1968 and 2016, is currently director of the Center for History and Diplomatic Documentation at the Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation and a member of the CEBRI Board of Trustees. He represented Brazil at the UN in New York, was ambassador to Chile, and consul general in Madrid and Porto. He served in the Presidency of the Republic, in the Secretariat of State, and was Inspector General of the Foreign Service. He taught International Relations Theory at the Rio Branco Institute and is the author of books and articles on international politics.

1 How much room for maneuver does Brazil have and what are the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

Brazil's relations with the US are fundamentally different from those it has with China. Its ties with the US are diverse and, throughout history, have included virtually every possibility offered by the repertoire of international coexistence, from cultural exchange to military alliance, as was the case in World War II. It is a 200-year journey marked by intense diplomatic and societal exchange. Despite circumstantial distances, the two societies remain close due to their adherence to "Western values," starting

with democracy. Relations with China are recent, having begun in 1974 and expanded significantly, but the focus is on economic and trade issues. The contrast in the modes of engagement implies significant variations when examining the consequences for the Brazilian diplomatic margin of maneuver in the face of the Sino-American confrontation, the contours of which are still undefined. To narrow the field of speculation, one approach would be to ask whether the confrontation could lead to one side demanding concessions from Brazil, what kind of concessions those would be, and what our conditions would be for addressing them. The demand would arise from the possibility that Brazil might take some action that would "harm" or "weaken" one of the sides, which would react with some threat of retaliation. It is more likely that the hypotheses that this will happen come from the United States, precisely because of the breadth of its ties and the fact that American interests, in addition to being more comprehensive, include, by definition, a strategic and regional security dimension, which for the Chinese does not exist today in a clear and ostensible way. The escalation of the confrontation and the corresponding "sense of threat" could lead the Americans to make demands and exert pressure in the direction of alignment. The "threats" would be unilaterally defined and therefore almost unpredictable in scope (control of ports in the Panama Canal or dominance of Greenland were not security risks until Trump took office, etc.).

Brazilian diplomacy has accumulated a long experience of dealing with American pressure, often resisting it, sometimes making concessions, but essentially never failing to serve a vision of

national interest, which, incidentally, is not always unambiguous. At times of strong ideological rapprochement with the US, such as during the post-1964 military governments, relations involving Brazilian ambitions for power (200 miles of territorial waters, nuclear program, computer law, etc.) had conflicting components. They remained within the logic of bilateral interests. Now, a third actor would enter the scene, and it is not unlikely that the Americans would argue that Brazil's rapprochement with China should be reversed and seek to force concessions (the Huawei case is symbolic and could be repeated). If the confrontation evolves, the precaution is to ensure that the balance of vulnerabilities, which may eventually be more favorable to the US, is contained within the limits of what would be the exercise of Brazilian diplomatic autonomy, of which maintaining free and unimpeded commercial and political relations with China is now a fundamental part.

Historically speaking, the prospect of a global bipolar dispute affecting us is not new, but today it would follow a different dynamic. In a way, Brazil has coexisted since the beginning of the 20th century with the long American hegemony, which constituted a clear unipolar regime in the region. There have been moments of challenge to this hegemony, usually due to the importation of global bipolarity into the continental sphere, such as in the confrontation between the US and Germany (1930s) and later with the Soviet Union (USSR). In both cases, American hegemony was uncontested—which is no longer the case today—and America's adversaries had nothing comparable to the economic influence that China has in trade with Brazil and its neighbors. In other words,

the Asian country has economic leverage that we did not see in previous bipolar situations (although it does not have a presence of immigrants, as in German communities, or ideological appeal, as in the USSR). The Chinese have leverage, limited to the economic sphere, which can be used, but under current conditions, this is unlikely. The other side of the coin is that, after the tariff hike, there is the possibility of specific trade gains if Brazilian commodities replace American exports to China.

2 What impact could participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

On the eve of the first expanded BRICS presidential summit in the context of a rapidly and profoundly changing international order, analyzing the group's direction is necessarily a provisional exercise. So far, participation in the Group has brought Brazil dividends in terms of prestige, determined by the unique diplomatic encounter it has enabled with world powers such as Russia and China, and regional powers such as India and South Africa.

Financial institutions, especially the New Development Bank (NDB), open up prospects for a greater presence in Asia, such as instruments for sectoral cooperation (health, finance, etc.). BRICS, in its current form, has served us well. From the perspective of its proposals, BRICS is an instrument that can strengthen our multilateral positions, as its reformist goals are not far from the global demands of the countries of the South and Brazil since

the 1960s. The Group was an aggregator of positions, leveraged by the weight of its founders, and was not created to protect itself from adversaries or enemies. Recently, however, its operating conditions have changed, starting with the new members; expansion was apparently not the Brazilian option because it would, in theory, diminish our ability to influence the Group's objectives. On the other hand, if we look at the current situation, the political challenges have also changed, and the first stems from the growing weakening of an order that the Group, in its own way, wanted (and still wants) to reform, as recommended in its programmatic resolutions. The second, more unexpected, is the fact that Trump is taking measures (such as tariffs) that affect everyone, albeit in different ways, and claims, for peculiar reasons, that the Group is a threat to American power because, among other things, it aims to create an alternative to the dollar. BRICS, which did not want an "enemy," may now have one. It is clear that the choice of BRICS as a target is linked to the fact that China and Russia are founding members of the Group, and there is no shortage of analyses concluding that its vocation today is to become an instrument of Chinese interests. China, due to the power it has acquired, stands out on the international stage and will have influence in the Group (it certainly intends to lead it) and across the international agenda. Will BRICS become an instrument for China's international projection? Or will the group create its own identity and, in a perspective shared by its members, will BRICS be the embryo of a power center that, in a multipolar world, would represent the South and the ideals of multilateralism?

What will prevail? It is necessary to consider that the heterogeneous nature of the Group places limits on the instrumentalization of BRICS. To work in China's favor, the Group would have to go beyond consensus on reformist goals and adopt and support some Chinese interests imposed on the group. This would mean, for example, introducing alignment around geopolitics and the clashes that may provoke with the US. If the confrontation with the US escalated, would the Group maintain its cohesion? How would the Group behave if the US targeted it with specific measures, bearing in mind that, within BRICS, there are both enemies and strategic partners of the United States? The fact is that the Group's heterogeneity, combined with the consensus rule, makes it difficult to take decisive decisions to advance the particular interests of any country (we prevented Venezuela from joining against China's will). Just as it limits China's ability to instrumentalize the Group, it can also limit the projection of Brazil's own issues on the multilateral agenda, such as clearer resolutions on Security Council reform and denuclearization (China and Russia would limit more emphatic statements on reform or the abolition of nuclear weapons). For Brazil, there are issues on our multilateral agenda, such as human rights, that would be difficult to mobilize the Group around.

To address Trump's short-term measures, it is likely that some consensus will be built (albeit with limitations), as was shown at the April ministerial meeting and, more generally, in the positions on international crises (Gaza, Ukraine) that the Group defends and that are not foreign to Brazil (or the Global South). The new question is whether reformism will now contin-

ue or transform. The current situation, however, poses a greater challenge; it seems that now, more than ever, it is necessary to reform multilateral institutions and, in some cases, to recreate them, restoring the legitimacy of the Security Council and the World Trade Organization (WTO) so that they can return to full operation. In this field, friction with the US is almost inevitable, given the Trump administration's boycott of any initiative that seeks to maintain and strengthen multilateral rules.

And the question arises: would BRICS have the credentials to lead a movement toward rebuilding multilateralism? Would it be ready, or would it be necessary to create more diplomatic space for BRICS to become the pivot for building a new pole of power with reformist contours? This is no easy diplomatic task, not least because two of its members are already power centers, but for Brazil, it is strategically important to maintain an active participation in the Group. Its relevance will depend on the extent to which we are able to project our ideas onto the BRICS platform. More than the impact that BRICS may have on Brazilian foreign policy, the question is what impact Brazilian diplomacy may have on the fate of BRICS.

3 Is the concept of the Global South appropriate for guiding Brazilian foreign policy?

At first glance, the concept of the Global South serves as a descriptive reference to the aggregate of developing countries

rather than as an instrument or platform for diplomatic action. Previous attempts to mobilize the South, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) or the G77 at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), had specific focuses and institutionality. In both cases, there was a global interlocutor to whom responsibility could be attributed for the defects of the order that was to be corrected. For the NAM, it was the superpowers, due to the irrationality of the nuclear arms race; for the G77, it was the rich West, due to its resistance to measures that would mitigate inequality between countries and unlock the paths to development. With globalization and the end of real socialism, the lines of confrontation became blurred. One factor was the growing diversity in the developing world, especially since the 1973 oil crisis. The result was a dilution of the original goals of global reform of the international order. On the other hand, post-Cold War geopolitical conditions allowed for what was called "the rise of the rest," even though "the rest" meant different things to different people.

Nevertheless, albeit with new contours, and perhaps more seriously (telling a story of the failure of the international order), the problems posed in the 1950s and 1960s remain present: nuclear weapons have not been forgotten (on the contrary, they are becoming more sophisticated, even among BRICS members), the problem of inequality has not been overcome, and no effective multilateral system has been created to resolve situations that threaten peace. On the other hand, new issues, such as the environment and the digital economy, have been raised but have made

less progress than desired and have not yet led to the creation of global coalitions of countries in the South.

Although it is difficult to imagine mobilizing processes such as those experienced by developing countries with the NAM and the G77, the usefulness of the concept of the Global South should not be diminished. It serves as a reference to the persistence of inequalities that must be overcome when considering the future of the international order. It has symbolic power and has gained ground in the repertoire of contemporary international relations, as evidenced by the frequency with which academic debates and journalistic articles use the concept. In this sense, it serves foreign policy by reinforcing the solidarity-based identity of Brazil's international presence, expressed in South-South cooperation instruments and in the struggle to promote a more just and peaceful international order. Perhaps this is the limit of the concept's relevance to Brazilian foreign policy.

4 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

It is imperative to condemn and criticize measures that are obviously contrary to international norms. The defense of law as the foundation of the international order is part of the historical legacy of the region, which, despite authoritarian relapses, we helped to build. The ideal attitude would be, in the face of measures such

as the *tarifaço* (Trump's high tariffs), or threats to Panama, or illegal deportations to El Salvador, to articulate common positions among Latin Americans, as was customary in the past. Today, this task faces obstacles that are difficult to overcome. First, the current situation, marked by political divisions among Latin American states, does not help (and in certain circumstances even blocks) the promotion of common positions. On the other hand, the effects of the US government's measures affect countries differently, and the tendency, especially in trade, is to choose bilateral negotiation processes (this was the case with the 1982 debt and has been the case with the recently imposed tariffs). Also resulting from regional divisions, another decisive factor in weakening the possibility of articulating common positions is the weakening of multilateral mechanisms in the region. It is almost impossible to imagine Brazil and Argentina thinking in harmony on any issues related to US relations with the region. And the two countries have often been key players in regional diplomatic articulations.

5 What should Brazil's position be toward authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

The defense of human rights is a constitutional obligation for Brazilian foreign policy, and the consequent position should be to condemn any authoritarian regime in the region. This is, in fact, enshrined in various multilateral documents with the adoption of democratic clauses (Mercosur, Organization of American States) that provide for sanctions in the event of institutional breakdowns.

There are solid reasons for concern about this issue. In addition to the harm they do to their societies, authoritarian regimes can, in many cases, cause international problems in order to strengthen their legitimacy, which is generally fragile (a conspicuous example was the invasion of the Falkland Islands or, now, Maduro's claim on Essequibo). Criticism or condemnation of authoritarianism, when driven by states, inevitably has a political component, that is, it affects relations between those who criticize or condemn authoritarian measures and those who are criticized or condemned. States do not act with the freedom of NGOs; ethical principles are shaped or limited by interests. This does not mean abandoning them or forgetting the ongoing effort to promote and guarantee democracy. The problem is how to do so in a realistic and effective manner. There are no universal solutions, and the paths are dictated by concrete situations. The reality is that, even for the major powers, influencing the internal order of countries is almost always a frustrating task. And, in the case of Brazilian democracy, there is often a dissonance between the demands of social sectors and what diplomacy can and does do (we saw the criticism of Brazilian diplomatic conduct in the Venezuelan elections). In such cases, the question that always arises is what would be gained by openly and forcefully condemning the regime and what would be lost in terms of influence. The promotion of democracy should not be forgotten; it is part of our international identity and must be conducted with realism, never to the point of going unnoticed by Brazilian society and our neighbors.

6 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

In these matters, the framework for political action is the set of universal and regional institutions dedicated, on the basis of conventions, to defending and promoting human rights. We have ratified most human rights treaties, accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and signed the Standing Invitation commitment for Human Rights Council rapporteurs. We are firmly committed to defending multilateral instruments in the area of human rights. We must honor them, seek to improve them, and reinforce their legitimacy. Today, these tasks have become even more necessary and urgent in the face of attacks by powerful nations on the instruments that institutionalized the defense of human rights, especially its most ambitious achievement, the International Criminal Court. Brazil certainly has a role to play in this process.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

There is no doubt that Brazil has played an important role in these issues since Rio92. We are a decisive player in climate negotiations. Can we be more influential? The first condition is that

there must be a firm consensus at the national level regarding the policies we should adopt internally (which is not always easy, as can be seen in the case of oil exploration in the Amazonian Equatorial Margin), but it is a condition for expanding our bargaining power and ensuring credibility to propose more ambitious goals. Hosting COP30 in Brazil is no small challenge. Substantial progress is needed, especially in the area of climate finance, and Brazilian diplomacy has the credentials to achieve it.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

The international scenario has always influenced the internal dynamics of Brazilian politics, strictly speaking since Independence, after all, it is England that guarantees the legitimacy of the Bragança family in Brazil. In the 20th century, the communist movement had repercussions in Brazil in various ways, including support for political parties, and, on the other hand, the Vargas dictatorship rode the waves of fascism. Today, in a globalized world, the internal repercussions of "international waves" inevitably increase and, in the current situation, this is a cause for concern in view of the rise of the extreme right, which tends to be harmful to the pillars of the international order that we have historically defended. Among many, two themes stand out, and the first is the fact that, for many reasons, the social and political bases of the far-right have expanded across virtually every continent and converge toward authoritarian political solutions (with significant variations;

Melloni is different from Erdogan, Orban, etc.). As in the 1930s, an international polarization has been established that promotes the legitimacy of authoritarian governments, with consequences for movements in the national political system, and which, as in that decade, is a driving factor in the intensification of internal confrontation, now strengthened by the ease offered by social media.

The second factor is the United States' role as guarantor (or promoter) of authoritarianism. In the case of Brazil, the risk is that Trump's interest may expand to the point of attempting to influence not only ideological trends but also specific events, such as elections. This would not be an unprecedented experience; one need only recall American movements in Brazil prior to 1964 or, even more profoundly, the overthrow of Allende. It is reasonable to expect that, with today's instant investigation mechanisms, it is possible that there will be no conditions for such experiences to be repeated, but others may be outlined. And, strictly speaking, the best protection against extremism would always be to guarantee the institutional defenses of democracy. Reinforcing them is the challenge that progressive sectors of Brazilian politics must face.

Guilherme Casarões political scientist, is professor of Brazilian Studies at Florida International University. He was a professor at FGV EAESP, visiting professor at Brown University, and is the coordinator of the Far Right Observatory. He conducts research in the area of Brazilian foreign policy and the global far-right.

1 How much room for maneuver does Brazil have, and what are the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

Brazil has a long tradition of universalist foreign policy, which has historically allowed us to navigate international politics in various configurations, ensuring the country's autonomy vis-à-vis global power centers. In addition to universalism, Brazil has built good relations with both the United States and China, from a political-diplomatic and economic standpoint.

Proportionally speaking, Brazil has pursued a pendulum strategy similar to that of the 1930s, described by historian Gerson Moura as "pragmatic equidistance." This pragmatism has allowed the country, over the last few years, to refrain from taking sides in the Sino-American trade war, which began during Donald Trump's first term (2017-2020). Over the last few years, we have seen both

a strengthening of relations with China and the US and a deepening of economic exchange with what are, respectively, our first and second trading partners.

However, Brazil's ability to defend its national interests in a changing world depends on strategic choices. It is not a question of "playing it safe," acting passively or reactively to the escalation of the technological-commercial war between the two great powers, but of drawing up an action plan that allows us to exploit the opportunities offered by the current situation and defend ourselves from the threats of an increasingly unstable context.

In this sense, we should praise some recent moves in Brazilian foreign policy. The first of these concerns the increasingly intense relations with China, evidenced by President Lula's recent state visit to Beijing. Sino-Brazilian relations have been consolidating with due maturity, but at the same time with caution on the part of Brazil, so that the growing asymmetry between the two countries does not compromise our autonomous global integration. Brazil's decision not to formally join the New Silk Road project, but to seek growing synergies in the field of infrastructure, seems to be the right one. At the same time, reciprocal tariffs between China and the United States open up new opportunities for commodity exports to the Chinese market, favoring Brazilian agribusiness.

Secondly, Brazil's quest to maintain constructive ties with the US government, despite all the apprehensions and instability generated by Donald Trump's return to the White House, deserves to be highlighted. In behind-the-scenes negotiations, Brazil's Min-

istry of Foreign Affairs has played an important role in stabilizing bilateral relations. Maintaining trade ties with the US, which has a trade surplus with Brazil, is fundamental for the industrial and service sectors and ensures us a cordial relationship, at the very least, with the new Trump administration.

2 What impact could participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

BRICS has been an important instrument of Brazilian foreign policy since its creation in the mid-2000s. Political coordination within the bloc has allowed Brazil to project itself globally as an emerging power, alongside countries (Russia, India, and China) that, at that time, had similar stature. In other words, BRICS was central to the consolidation of a new international identity, compatible with Brazilian ambitions at the beginning of the 21st century.

From a strategic point of view, the BRICS produced a triple benefit for Brazil's international integration. First, together with other variable geometry coalitions created at the same time (such as the IBSA Forum, the commercial G20, and the financial G20), the bloc gave Brazil legitimacy to act as a representative of the Global South. Second, participation in the BRICS, coupled with the bloc's international projection, consolidated the idea of Brazil as an emerging power, holding a privileged place in this multipolar world under construction—and capable of contributing to the construction of multilateral rules that reflect this

new correlation of forces in the international order. Third, participation in BRICS contributed to the deepening of political and economic ties with China, Russia, and India, which had already been advancing since the late 1990s under the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, but which gained new momentum with the creation of the bloc.

In recent years, however, BRICS has sometimes become an uncomfortable place for Brazil. This is related to two simultaneous (and in a sense interrelated) movements in international politics: Russia's renewed military expansionism and China's impressive economic and technological rise. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, but especially since the invasion of Ukraine that began in 2022, the bloc has been used by Vladimir Putin to shield Russia from the diplomatic isolation imposed by Western countries. At the same time, the recent expansion of BRICS, with the incorporation of six new African, Middle Eastern, and Asian nations, most of which are autocratic, has created the impression, even in Brazil, that the bloc aims to serve Chinese strategic interests.

Although I believe the assessment that BRICS is an anti-Western alliance is incorrect, not least because many of the new members are long-standing allies of the United States, the new configuration of the bloc creates difficulties and embarrassments for Brazilian foreign policy. Brazil has seen its defense of international law undermined, which led us to vote against Russia since it attacked its neighbor, and there is no shortage

of criticism (both internal and external) that the Lula administration was pushed into a pro-Russia position. Similarly, the balance between democracies and autocracies in the BRICS has been disrupted by recent expansions, reducing Brazil's space for dialogue with other democratic nations within the bloc. Brazil's veto of Venezuela's admission at the Kazan Summit in 2024 showed that, in the face of Chinese and Russian interests, Brazil was left with a reactive position.

This does not mean that Brazil should leave BRICS or ignore the potential benefits of its participation in the bloc, but it does require caution and strategy on the part of the Lula administration. The Brazilian presidency of the bloc in 2025 will be an important test of the country's ability to set the collective agenda, avoiding issues that put us on a collision course with the new Trump administration (such as the de-dollarization of the global economy) or with our European partners (such as an open defense of Russia in the current conflict).

Everything indicates that Brazil will follow a similar path to that of its G20 presidency last year: embracing the climate agenda, stimulating energy transition, combating hunger and poverty, and reforming global governance as structural and proactive themes. If it manages to produce some consensus, which is naturally challenging, Brazil will position itself as an unavoidable leader in the construction of a new international order that preserves Brazilian and Global South interests in times of hegemonic transition and growing dispute between major powers.

3 Is the concept of the Global South appropriate for guiding Brazilian foreign policy?

One of the great strategic assets of Brazilian foreign policy is the fact that we have multiple international identities, from which we seek to develop and deepen bilateral ties, consolidate regional integration processes, and actively participate in multilateral agenda debates. Brazil is, at the same time, a Western, Latin American, and developing country. Brazil's ability to navigate between different international interlocutors and issues has given it legitimacy and authority, consolidating its status as an emerging power over the last few decades. The concept of the Global South—which is more political than geographical, it should be noted—is directly related to this identity dimension of Brazilian foreign policy.

Our interaction with this space, formerly called the "Third World," is primarily due to the fact that we are a developing country. Based on this key factor, Brazil has been able to unite nations with similar profiles around common agendas, whether in the field of international trade, conflicts, or environmental, human rights, and non-proliferation regimes. Also noteworthy is Brazil's investment in so-called South-South technical cooperation, which Brazil uses both to promote international development and to build its own *soft power* at the global level.

The concept of the Global South also speaks directly to our Latin American identity. In the second half of the 20th century, Brazil was sometimes closer to countries in Africa or the Middle

East than to its own neighbors. Over the past 30 years, diplomatic investment in South America has allowed Brazil to unify these two realities, which were not always aligned. It is no exaggeration to say that Brazilian foreign policy was able to bring Latin American elements to the construction of an idea of the Global South—I am thinking, for example, of the articulation of the South America-Africa and South America-Arab Countries Summits in the mid-2000s. The reverse is also true: Brazil's recognition of Palestine helped consolidate solidarity with the Palestinian cause (a historical theme of Third Worldism) among Latin American nations.

Finally, Brazil's defense of values historically associated with the West—such as democracy and human rights—also allows Brazil to incorporate them into the perspectives of the Global South. These values mark the country's performance in multilateral forums—from the UN Peacebuilding Commission to the Human Rights Council. Similarly, the actions (now residual) of the IBSA Forum were openly guided by the synthesis between democratic values and the pursuit of development in the Global South through technical cooperation.

Ultimately, Brazil acts as a bridge builder between Western and non-Western realities through its diplomatic leadership among a broad group of developing countries. From the Brazilian perspective, this not only lends legitimacy to the country's international actions, but also allows Brazil to position itself in a non-aligned and constructive manner in the face of renewed polarization between major powers, notably the United States and China.

4 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

The new Trump administration is still quite new, so it is difficult to clearly measure the effects of foreign and trade policy decisions on the region. Mass deportations, crackdowns on transnational criminal organizations, and tariffs give us an idea of what the White House's policy toward Latin America will be, which some analysts are already calling an "*America First*" foreign policy. The feeling is that Trump sees the hemisphere as the exclusive sphere of influence of the United States, which is why he intends to wage a geoeconomic battle—commercial, logistical, and technological—against China in strategic regional locations, such as the Panama Canal or even Greenland.

So far, the Lula administration has maintained a low profile in its relations with the United States. Behind-the-scenes negotiations conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance played an important role in protecting the Brazilian economy from the uncertainties produced by the "tariff hike" announced by Trump in April. Even in the face of recent statements by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio about the possibility of sanctions against Supreme Court Minister Alexandre de Moraes, Brazilian authorities have not spoken out publicly. This can be explained by Donald Trump's own strategy of attacking whenever he is cornered, creating instability and uncertainty with potentially devastating effects on his targets, especially those that are

already vulnerable in relation to the United States—which is the case with Brazil.

Many analysts have suggested that Lula should increase his rhetoric against the US government, especially given his low popularity rating with just under 18 months to go before the presidential elections. The bet is that a "rally around the flag" effect could occur in Brazil, allowing Lula to benefit from the resurgence of nationalism among the population in the face of an external threat. In fact, we have seen the left rise again politically in countries such as Canada and Australia due to the association of the local right with Trumpism and a renewed nationalist sentiment. However, there is no indication that Trump will mobilize Brazilians to the point of justifying a direct confrontation that would bring electoral benefits to Lula, and everything indicates that an economic clash between the two countries would increase the fragility of the Brazilian situation.

If US pressure on its southern neighbors increases, one possible course of action for Brazil is to work together with other progressive leaders in the region. Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Chile, for example, could act as a bloc in any questioning of US regional interference. History teaches us that Washington always prefers to fight individual battles with countries, given the enormous asymmetry of power between the United States and any of its neighbors. But the past also shows us the persistent difficulties of articulating a united Latin American front. In the case of a response to Trump, the leadership and articulation capacity of Brazilian foreign policy would be put to the test.

5 What should Brazil's position be toward authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

It is essential that Brazil remain consistent with its constitutional principles, respecting national sovereignty and non-intervention on the one hand, and the prevalence of human rights and peaceful conflict resolution on the other. This means that Brazil should seek to maintain cordial and constructive diplomatic relations with all countries in the region, including the authoritarian regimes of Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, but without shying away from condemning democratic breakdowns or humanitarian violations, especially when they have the potential to destabilize the region.

Even so, this is a position fraught with challenges. The case of Venezuela, in this sense, is emblematic: although a distancing from Nicolás Maduro's regime began to take shape at the end of Dilma Rousseff's administration, the positions taken by subsequent governments exposed a series of contradictions. In 2017, the Temer administration, under the leadership of Foreign Ministers José Serra and Aloysio Nunes, worked to suspend Venezuela from Mercosur, given the Venezuelans' failure to comply with intra-bloc agreements and the worsening political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in the country. Brazil's stance, although consistent with its own defense of democracy within the bloc, contributed to Venezuela's isolation in the region, paving the way for the growing presence of China and Russia in the neighboring country, including as supporters of the regime.

The Bolsonaro administration's decision to recognize Juan Guaidó as president not only aggravated this situation, but also weakened our constitutional principle of non-intervention. It is worth remembering that Bolsonaro and his allies even considered supporting the Donald Trump administration if the US decided to intervene on Venezuelan soil to change the current regime. This is inconceivable from the point of view of Brazilian diplomatic traditions.

Upon returning to government, Lula embarked on an ill-fated strategy to restore ties with Venezuela, based on two basic premises: the first is that it would be essential to maintain constructive and pragmatic relations with our neighbor, with whom we have trade relations and common concerns along the Amazonian border. The second is that, once trust was restored, Brazil could play a central role in the country's political transition, ensuring the return of Venezuelan democracy. It is quite possible that the Brazilian government underestimated the resilience (and authoritarianism) of Nicolás Maduro, who did not fulfill his part of the Barbados Agreement—which provided for fair and free elections in the country in 2024—and even threatened to invade Guyana in the name of historical territorial claims.

Maduro's persistence in power is one of the biggest problems that Brazilian foreign policy will have to address in the coming years. After Brazil's failed attempt to safeguard the Venezuelan electoral process, it was up to Brazil to distance itself diplomatically from its neighbor. In part, Brazil's failure was also due to the in-

ability (some would say structural) of its neighbors to unite around a common regional cause. With all its limitations, Brazil's position should continue to be one of repudiating attempts at intervention in Venezuela while condemning the country's growing authoritarianism, in the hope that a future window of opportunity will allow Brazil to act regionally in favor of pacifying Venezuela.

6 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

Yes, not least because they are constitutional principles and core values of Brazilian society. Since the beginning of the New Republic, with the exception of Jair Bolsonaro's term in office, our foreign policy has been mobilized in defense of democracy. In South America, Brazil's experience in mediating constitutional crises, as in the case of Paraguay, led us to develop a democratic regulatory framework within Mercosur—the 1998 Ushuaia Protocol. A few years later, Brazil supported the approval of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which has hemispheric reach. The defense of democratic values is also evident in Brazil's actions at the United Nations, whether in multilateral action in post-conflict situations or in the search for consensus against anti-democratic extremism, as we saw at the summit organized by Presidents Lula and Pedro Sánchez of Spain on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in 2024.

Human rights are also an integral part of Brazil's multilateral activities. In 1993, Brazil assumed the role of rapporteur for the Vienna Declaration on the subject and contributed to the creation of the position of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. In the following years, Brazil exercised leadership in the construction of the Human Rights Council and in proposing themes that addressed the links between human rights and racism, human rights and access to health, human rights and the fight against poverty, as well as the rights of marginalized populations, especially from a gender perspective. Brazil's historical role gives us legitimacy to address the issue, both as a democratic country and as a developing nation.

However, I believe it is important to qualify what we mean by "defense of democracy and human rights." The defense of principles and practices in international forums does not authorize any country to seek to impose them in a violent, arbitrary, or selective manner. In other words, the struggle for democracy and human rights does not override the sovereignty of nations and the self-determination of peoples. In this sense, Brazil has taken the right course of action, criticizing specific situations of attacks on democratic institutions or human rights violations (expressed, for example, in public statements by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in statements by presidents and authorities), but keeping diplomatic channels open for constructive dialogue on these issues, whenever possible.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

Strictly speaking, Brazil has been a leading player in climate negotiations since the early 1990s, when we hosted the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as Rio92). This was one of the most significant turning points in the foreign policy of the New Republic and reflects the country's openness to debate the so-called "new issues" on the international agenda.

Naturally, the denser and complex the environmental debates became, the greater the commitments required of all participants in the global ecological regime, notably on the issue of climate change. Here, we note some ambiguities in Brazilian foreign policy. On the one hand, the country has committed to ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets—even collaborating in the design and improvement of relevant mechanisms and standards, such as carbon credits and emissions reductions from deforestation and forest degradation.

On the other hand, Brazil has anchored itself to the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" to continue demanding—in my view, fairly—that developed countries finance policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change and reduce emissions. The problem is that, over the last 30 years, the global scenario has changed significantly. Today, China leads in greenhouse

gas emissions, followed by the United States and the European Union as a whole. India and Russia have established themselves as the third and fourth largest individual global emitters. The division established by the Kyoto Protocol between developed countries and the rest of the world no longer applies. This has undermined multilateral commitments and led to the demobilization of important economic actors such as the US, Canada, Russia, and Japan.

For this very reason, I believe that Brazil has a fundamental role to play in three dimensions of environmental debates. First, it must act as a model for other countries in terms of energy transition and emissions reduction, insisting on the ambitious national targets presented under the Paris Agreement. Second, it must invest in building broad environmental commitments within the Global South, a process in which I highlight the role of the BASIC alliance (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), the G77, and the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, as well as the recent tropical forest alliance signed by Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Indonesia. Third, it must lead the decarbonization process, based on national comparative advantages, such as electricity, wind, solar, and biofuels.

Nevertheless, the current debate on oil exploration in the Equatorial Margin remains one of the major challenges for Brazil to fully exercise its leadership in environmental debates. On the eve of COP30 in Belém, the Lula administration has not yet been able to align its environmental and energy agenda around a synthesis that positions Brazil at the forefront of discussions.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

Since the Cold War, we have not seen Brazilian domestic politics so porous to the effects of global transformations. I am not suggesting that, in the last three decades, world events have not affected electoral or parliamentary movements in Brazil: to give three examples, I highlight the way in which the discussion on the Free Trade Area of the Americas produced an unexpected coalition between industrialists and trade unions in the late 1990s; the way in which the Trump administration's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem in 2017 reorganized the evangelical caucus in Congress around a change in Brazil's traditional position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, paving the way for the election of Jair Bolsonaro; and the way in which the humanitarian, political, and economic crisis in Venezuela served as a rallying cry for the opposition to project a domestic risk if the Worker's Party (PT) were to be re-elected in 2018.

What makes the current international reality so connected to domestic dynamics is the fact that the main national political forces—PT/Lulaism and Bolsonarism—are increasingly articulated globally. In the case of PT, the transnational networks built up over decades of party activity (whether within the São Paulo Forum, the Puebla Group, or through contacts with politicians, parties, academics, and activists in Europe and the US) were important not only for keeping the party and its narratives alive after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, but also for lending legitimacy to Lula's

election in 2022—and even for thwarting the coup plans that culminated on January 8, 2023.

However, it is the "conservative wave" that has swept the world in recent years—and whose main expression is President Donald Trump—that poses the greatest challenges to national politics. The rise of the far-right in the US served as an ideological and strategic model for Bolsonaro's candidacy in 2018, giving him legitimacy from the outside in. Since the beginning of his administration, the Bolsonaro movement, led by Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, has invested in parallel diplomacy with far-right leaders in the US (led by Steve Bannon), Latin America, and Europe, the most visible result of which is the creation of the Madrid Forum in 2020, which has been active in the transatlantic space.

The transnational far-right network was mobilized, unsuccessfully, in the 2022 presidential elections. After Trump's reelection to the White House, it has been reactivated with full force. Eduardo Bolsonaro and his allies have embarked on a cross-border crusade against the Federal Supreme Court and, in particular, against Minister Alexandre de Moraes. In the US, Bolsonarism has the support not only of Trump and Marco Rubio (who has already made statements indicating that Moraes could be the target of US sanctions), but also of billionaire Elon Musk and a number of Trumpist lawmakers.

This leads me to believe that one of the great risks to Brazilian politics, especially in the context of the 2026 elections, is the mobilization of the political and economic resources of the

Trump administration (and its allies in the US Congress) to ensure the victory of the Bolsonaro camp. How this might happen is still uncertain, but there are historical precedents for US interference, such as Operation Brother Sam and its antecedents in the early 1960s, which serve as a warning for the scenario that may unfold in Brazil next year.

Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida is a researcher at the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (Cebrap) and professor emeritus of political science at the University of São Paulo, where she directed the Institute of International Relations (2009-2013). She has published: *'Crise Econômica e Interesses Organizados'* (Edusp, 1996), *'Os Anos de Ouro – Ensaios sobre a Democracia no Brasil'* (Ed. Horizontes, Lisbon, 2019) and, with Gian Luca Gardini, 'Foreign policy responses to the rise of Brazil' (Palgrave-McMillan, 2016).

1 How much room for maneuver does Brazil have and what are the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

It is too early to say, as the nature and proportions of this confrontation are not yet clear. If it remains in the realm of trade war, the country could benefit if it knows how to navigate well between the two poles. If it advances into other areas, everything could become more complicated. If the dispute takes the form of spheres of influence, there could be strong pressure for Brazil to align itself. The great political fragmentation of Latin America—and South America—makes it impossible to implement a regional coordination strategy to counterbalance the game played by the major powers.

Brazil is what the literature calls *a "middle power,"* whose ability to influence depends on the strength of multilateral arenas and the formation of coalitions within them. What we are seeing is the weakening of multilateralism.

2 What impact can participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

The nature of BRICS has changed with the rise of China and the entry of new participants. From a coalition of intermediate countries, it seems to be transforming into an instrument of Chinese foreign policy, despite resistance from India. With the decline of large multilateral organizations, it is possible that both BRICS and the G20 will gain increasing importance in Brazilian foreign policy.

This participation reveals a new tension in the country's foreign policy, namely the divergence between economic and commercial interests, which bring Brazil closer to China and, secondarily, to other Asian countries, and the strength of democracy in the country, which benefits from closer ties with Western countries that are organized according to the principles of liberal democracy. Brazil is currently the only democracy in BRICS, and if it needs external pressure to defend it, as it did in 2022 under President Lula, it will not find support within BRICS.

3 Is the concept of the Global South appropriate for guiding Brazilian foreign policy?

I don't think so. It is a pseudo-progressive discourse that doesn't make much sense because it masks the real power struggles, which are not between North and South, and can cover up the country's vassalage to China.

4 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

As an analyst, it is better to observe—and if possible, explain—than to prescribe. But let's see. Brazil could try to find ways to cooperate with countries in the region and oppose more aggressive initiatives, preferably in coordination with other countries. I think the recent talks between Finance Minister Fernando Haddad and the president of Mexico on trade alternatives are a positive way to deal with the losses caused by Trump's aggressive tariffs. In the past, we missed the opportunity to build a regional organization to discuss problems and coordinate common initiatives wherever possible, when we contributed to the politicization of Unasur and turned it into a club organized according to political sympathy between left-wing and center-left governments. It would have been important to make it a body of states that share the same regional space, regardless of the political orientation of the governments in power.

5 What should Brazil's position be toward authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

Pragmatism and realism have always guided Brazilian foreign policy and will likely continue to do so. Brazil maintains diplomatic relations with all countries and will continue to do so. The country does not have the resources to act effectively in support of democracy and human rights in other countries. The recent elections in Venezuela are proof of this. The most the country can do is offer space and support for negotiations between democrats and authoritarians, when requested, and grant asylum to the persecuted. Transitions to democracy are domestic processes and cannot be induced from abroad.

6 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

In multilateral spaces, without a doubt. This is a tradition of Brazilian diplomacy, rarely broken. In any case, under the Trump presidency, these issues will likely lose ground in already weakened multilateral organizations.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

Brazil has stronger assets to act in the environmental area. Here, we are part of the problem, by destroying the Amazon, but also part of the solution, given our energy matrix and an important environmental policy. The problem is that the change of direction in the United States, the setbacks in Europe due to the war in Ukraine, India's ambiguity, etc., will make the transition to a low-carbon economy in the world very difficult. Brazil has no way of changing this, and the external situation strengthens the both the deniers and the "drill, baby, drill" crowd at Petrobras.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

The rise of the far-right in the United States is a disaster whose proportions we cannot yet measure. I fear that it is not only the beginning of the decline of the American Empire, but of the entire democratic West. It undoubtedly weakens the democratic camp and strengthens the Brazilian far-right. In the past, it was said that socialism was not possible in a single country; perhaps the same is true for democracy.

Maria Regina Soares de Lima, Ph.D. in Political Science from Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA, was a full professor at the University Research Institute of Rio de Janeiro and an associate professor at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. She is currently a collaborating professor in the Graduate Program at the Institute of Social and Political Studies at the State University of Rio de Janeiro and coordinator of the South American Political Observatory. She was a Level 1 A productivity fellow at the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) from 2003 to 2020 and, since 2021, has been a senior productivity fellow at CNPq.

1 What is Brazil's room for maneuver and the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

First, I would like to point out that I prefer to use the expression "Brazilian interests" rather than "national interests." I start from the premise that foreign policy is a government policy very similar to other government policies and not necessarily an exclusive policy of the state, which belongs to the hard core of Brazilian capitalism. As such, foreign policy tends to vary according to the political orientation of the government in power. Practically all of Brazil's

international actions have domestic impacts, and several of its domestic policies have international impacts. This cross-cutting nature between the domestic and foreign spheres is characteristic of the globalization of capitalism and the growing interdependence between the domestic and foreign spheres.

Having made this caveat, I would add something that is obvious from the contemporary international scene: the degrees of freedom in foreign policy between the 2000s and the present day have decreased significantly. At that time, the trend was toward the decentralization of power at the international level toward large emerging markets such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, later incorporated into the BRICS, the beginning of the emergence of China as a relevant player in the global geo-economy, and Russia itself, recovered after the economic debacle with the end of the Soviet Union.

Today, Brazil's room for maneuver is more limited, due to China's economic boom and Donald Trump's plan to regain international primacy through an aggressive trade policy that spares not even historical allies such as Canada and Mexico and defines China as the main global geopolitical and economic rival.

With the US-China polarization, promoted especially during Trump's second term, Brazil's degrees of freedom have narrowed and the global context has become more unstable and critical. Given this situation, Brazil's international opportunities depend on the pragmatic use of this rivalry, maintaining a position of equidistance, without unconditional adherence to either side of the geo-

political dispute, as is currently the case. The difference from the past is that foreign policy is increasingly politicized. Thus, an option of this nature depends on the political orientation of the government in power. The Bolsonaro administration was an unconditional ally of Donald Trump during his first term. In my view, as long as polarization continues, the results of the 2026 presidential elections will define Brazil's diplomatic option in the US-China dispute.

2 What impact could participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

Created in 2009, its goal was to leverage the power of emerging economies in global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Initially composed of Brazil, China, India, and Russia, and later joined by South Africa, it grew stronger in the face of the 2008-2009 economic crisis. In 2014, the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement were created. Overall, the period from 2009 to 2016 saw a decentralization of power and a trend toward multipolarity under the leadership of the so-called emerging powers. At the 15th BRICS Summit, the agenda was the creation of measures to reduce the use of the dollar and increase transactions in the currencies of member countries. In 2022, Dilma Rousseff was sworn in as president of the BRICS Bank, taking over the management of the Bank's loans. In 2023, the group was renamed BRICS+ with the invitation of six more countries to join: Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia,

and Iran. The predominance of Middle Eastern countries expanded the Asian space of the original formation. Brazil was opposed to the incorporation of full members and advocated for the creation of observer and partner countries, but China's position in favor of new members on equal terms prevailed. However, the difficulty of building consensus in a larger and more heterogeneous group became apparent when, at an extraordinary meeting, the group failed to reach consensus on classifying Hamas as a terrorist organization and expressly recognizing Israel's right to self-defense. With the election of Milei as president of Argentina, the country withdrew from BRICS, a political loss for Brazil.

BRICS+ today is very different from when it was created. It is larger, more heterogeneous, and, above all, China has clear economic primacy. Just to illustrate the change in that country's status vis-à-vis Brazil: in 1991, the two countries had similar GDPs: US$ 383.37 billion (China) and US$ 342.5 billion (Brazil). Due to a jump in income and technological advances, China has become a global economic power, reaching US$ 17,794.78 billion in 2023, while Brazil reached US$ 2,173.66 billion in the same year.

However, this change in status did not necessarily result in Chinese political domination over the other members. In my view, Chinese leverage has readjusted the Chinese project of global hegemony/primacy in terms of timing and *modus operandi* so as not to encourage a zero-sum view with developed Western countries. Thus, Brazil, as a democratic country in the South, has acquired an informal veto power in the group's decisions. Democracy, as a

geopolitical asset for Brazil, was expressed at the summit meeting in Russia in October 2024, without the presence of President Lula da Silva, where Brazil denied Venezuela's entry into BRICS. Venezuela reacted and accused Brazil of "inexplicable and immoral aggression." The meeting ended without any new members joining the bloc.

3 Is the concept of the Global South appropriate for guiding Brazilian foreign policy?

The expression Global South is a conceptual and political misconception because it refers to a very heterogeneous group of what was understood in the past as "developing countries" or Third World countries. This category made sense during the period of decolonization in the 1960s, when newly independent countries in Africa and Asia allied themselves with Latin American countries, at the time called "latecomers," in the demand for reforms in the global economic order. This is when the United Nations began to incorporate a reasonable number of new members composed of newly independent countries. This alliance was quite pragmatic in nature because it included countries that advocated neutrality in the East-West conflict, as well as countries such as Brazil and other Latin American countries that advocated for less radical reforms that took into account the specificities of that group of developing countries. In particular, certain norms, such as reciprocity, could not be applied indiscriminately to countries at a clear economic disadvantage compared to developed countries. The

United Nations became the privileged forum for the exercise of meta-power, in Stephen Krasner's words, by the "latecomers" and the newly independent countries. The differences between them were rhetorically diluted in the category of "developing countries."

The concept of the Global South has come to be used more recently to refer to an even more heterogeneous group, to differentiate the South from the North. Curiously, there is no counterpart, the Global North. In my view, this conceptual inadequacy is intentional. What it indicates is the intention to differentiate Western countries, which make up the North, from the rest, the heterogeneous group of the South. Does it make any sense to place China and a country with a small territory and a GDP of $60 million in the same group?

Authors such as Carlos Milani, et al. use the concept of the Geopolitical South to refer to countries in the South that are actively engaged in reform at the international level, including, for example, Turkey, Brazil, India, South Africa, and others. In this way, it specifies those that actually have sufficient material and symbolic capacities in the South, which differentiate them from the group of Southern countries and are critical of the power differential between countries. The expression Geopolitical aims to indicate reformist and critical action and the exercise of meta-power in an unstable and unpermissive international context, but one populated by institutions such as BRICS, for example.

Understood in this way, the concept of the Geopolitical South is appropriate for guiding current Brazilian foreign policy

and suggests that the country can pursue a foreign policy of pragmatic equidistance between the US and China.

4 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

Donald Trump's administration, in its second term, has been even more radical than the previous one in destroying the global liberal order, established by the US itself. The reasons why the US would be committing suicide, as a Financial Times columnist recently suggested, are complex, but they suggest how reasonably easy it is for the leader of a superpower to start a trade war with unpredictable consequences, even for himself.

Interestingly, Latin America has been relatively spared in this tariff *raid*, as it is a region where the US has a trade surplus. The issue of mass deportation of undocumented immigrants is one of the areas in which the region has been most affected, especially left-wing countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Cuba, which suffer from more severe restrictions. Although Brazil and Mexico are trying to obtain unanimous condemnation of Trump's policy from the region, the capacity for collective regional action has narrowed even further in the current situation. This restriction results from a combination of regional political fragmentation between right-wing and far-right governments and social democratic governments on the one hand, and Donald Trump's

return to the US presidency on the other. This was the case at the emergency meeting of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) held in Honduras in 2025. At that time, the proposal for a collective condemnation of the US threat to retake the Panama Canal was vetoed by Argentina and El Salvador, both governed by presidents allied with Trump.

In this complex regional context, Brazil's coordination of collective action in condemning any aggression by the Trump administration is hampered. For Brazil, in the absence of the instruments of the past—regional credits, private companies in the infrastructure and energy sectors—and in the face of an adverse regional political situation with Trump in power, any regional collective action is likely to fail, as it will be vetoed by one of the poles of the current political division in Latin America. In the current situation, Brazilian regional diplomacy tends to be bilateral, preventing any effort at regional coordination of collective action, as in the past.

In a context that is not at all conducive to a return to the past, the option to overcome any vetoes would be to change the decision-making rule from consensus to majority. This was exactly what Brazil and Mexico proposed at a subsequent CELAC meeting in 2025. On that occasion, at the end of the meeting, Brazil and Mexico were able to obtain a resolution condemning Trump's tariffs, even amid protests from the current Argentine president.

5 What should Brazil's position be towards authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

From an ethical perspective, Brazilian democracy must oppose any undemocratic regime in the region. By effectively making Nicolás Maduro's reelection permanent, Venezuela broke the democratic rule of regular rotation of presidential terms. Shortly after the presentation of the results of their presidential election at the end of July 2024 by the National Electoral Council—controlled by the government—the region was divided between the strongest opponents of the "Chavista" regime, such as Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, Panama, and the Dominican Republic, willing to pass a condemnatory resolution in the Organization of American States (OAS). On the other hand, mediators who, on Brazil's initiative, together with Colombia and Mexico, were willing to seek a mediation solution that would not lead to Venezuela's expulsion from that body.

The issue of Brazil's relationship with Venezuela during Lula's three terms in office, which is currently vehemently condemned by the Bolsonaro opposition and considered ambiguous by a considerable portion of the population, is much more complex than a dualistic, black-and-white view would lead one to believe.

In this case, we are faced with the classic Weberian duality between the logic of conviction and that of responsibility, which, in my view, Brazil faces in the Venezuelan case[2]. Acting according

2 For a more detailed discussion of the duality of conviction versus responsibility, in the case of Brazil vis-à-vis Venezuela, see the article by Maria Regina Soares de Lima and Digo Ives, 'For an ethics of responsibility: autonomy and democracy as necessary principles of Lula 3's foreign policy', *Le Monde Diplomatique – Brazil*, August 14, 2024.

to conviction could lead to an escalation of violence, a possible break with Maduro, and certainly to Venezuela's isolation in the region. Given the geopolitical weight that oil gives that country, which is also disputed by the US, its status as a regional pariah could lead to a strengthening of alliances with countries outside the region, such as Russia, China, and Iran. Isolating Venezuela would risk bringing global geopolitical conflict into the region, with unpredictable consequences. In the end, mediation did not work, Brazil did not recognize Maduro's victory, Lula did not attend Maduro's inauguration, but as he had previously stated, he did not break diplomatic relations, maintaining Brazilian diplomatic representation, but relations with Venezuela cooled significantly, losing the importance they had in the past.

As I noted above, in October 2024, Brazil vetoed Venezuela's entry into BRICS+, receiving heavy criticism from that country at the time. Furthermore, Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2025 accentuated the existing polarization between political forces in Latin America, contributing to a decrease in the degrees of freedom of Brazilian regionalism.

6 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

There is no incompatibility between conviction and responsibility in the defense of democracy and human rights in internation-

al forums. As we have seen, a democratic country in the Geopolitical South is a differential that countries such as Brazil and South Africa exhibit among those countries, which gives them greater weight in organizations such as BRICS+, as argued above.

In both cases, the democratic condition is a diplomatic and geopolitical asset. During Lula's third term, part of the reconstruction of Brazil's international image was based on the affirmation of the democratic regime, which had been seriously shaken after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016, the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, and the attack on the Congress and Judiciary buildings on January 8, 2023. The very revelation of the coup plot, hatched in the final moments of the Bolsonaro administration, highlighted the difference between the two administrations in terms of the international community and the threat to the newly installed democratic regime. The restoration of foreign policy buried once and for all the status of international pariah fully assumed by that administration.

In the field of human rights advocacy in international forums, Brazil under the Lula 3 administration definitively abandoned the conservative and religious human rights policy that characterized the Bolsonaro administration, led by evangelical pastor Damares Alves, who was opposed to gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, and minority rights. One of the first measures was to formalize Brazil's candidacy for a new term on the Human Rights Council (HRC), reaffirming its commitment to international treaties and instruments for assessing the human rights of UN member states. The government also formalized its

withdrawal from the Geneva Consensus[3], which the country had joined in 2020, along with the US, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, and Uganda, which defends the role of the family as the fundamental unit of society. It also returned to the Migration Pact, from which it had withdrawn in 2019, claiming it was an instrument of intervention in national sovereignty.

Although the international defense of democracy and human rights does not imply any contradiction between the logic of conviction and responsibility, a positive agenda on these two issues ultimately depends on the political-ideological orientation of the government in power. The greatest threat to the internationalization of this agenda lies in the growth of the right and the far-right, a phenomenon of a global nature.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

Certainly yes, for one obvious reason: Brazilian territory accounts for 59% of the Amazon rainforest, and Brazil is responsible for 75% of deforested area, which gives the country enormous

3 The Geneva Consensus is an international agreement created in 2020 by countries that defend the protection of life from conception and the strengthening of the family. Originally called the 'Geneva Consensus Declaration on the Promotion of Women's Health and the Strengthening of the Family', the document aims to ensure the highest standards of health for women, strengthen the family, and protect life from conception, without including abortion in sexual and reproductive rights. Brazil, under the government of Jair Bolsonaro, was one of its signatories, but the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva withdrew the country from the alliance in 2023.

responsibility in collective action on climate change and the environment. There are countless challenges for the country in this endeavor. Broadly speaking, these are of two natures: at the regional level, which includes the Pan-Amazonian countries in South America, and at the domestic level with regard to climate and environmental sustainability policies[4].

The protection of the environment and the resumption of Brazil's tradition in multilateral climate discussions was already emphasized in Lula da Silva's inauguration speech, which highlighted the differences with respect to climate denialism and deforestation in the Amazon under the previous government of Jair Bolsonaro. His first international commitment, while still president-elect, was to attend COP27 in Egypt. Once in office in 2023, he attended COP28 in Dubai, where he promised to eliminate deforestation in all biomes by 2030, launched a proposal to create an international fund to conserve tropical forests in 80 countries, and obtained approval for Brazil to host COP30, to be held in November of that year.

On Brazil's initiative, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) was revitalized with a summit of member countries in August 2024 in Pará. The Amazon Fund, which had been paralyzed under the previous government, was recapitalized with international donations that doubled the amount in the fund by 2022. As an immediate measure, the Executive Branch submitted to Congress a request for ratification of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation, and Access to Justice in Environmen-

4 For a broad discussion of the climate agenda and its challenges in the current government, see Lima, M.R.S. and Ives, Diogo, 2024. 'Political challenges in the implementation of the Lula 3 government's foreign policy', CEBRI – Revista, year 3, no. 9, (Jan-Mar): 103-122.

tal Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, known as the Escazú Agreement, signed by Brazil in 2018 but subsequently shelved.

At the regional level, the main challenge is the difficulty of coordinating common positions with other Pan-Amazonian countries in a region politically divided between right-wing, denialist governments and progressive governments, which are more favorable to the establishment of solid Pan-Amazonian governance. Even among progressive governments, which advocate ambitious goals and are critical of far-right denialism, this coordination is complex. This is the case in Brazil and Colombia, for example. The two leaders advocate different degrees of voluntary GHG emission reductions. For both, deforestation is a priority, but the Colombian leader advocates a faster transition, while the Brazilian leader has no defined position on the effective abandonment of fossil fuels. The issue of energy transition is likely to become a key issue in Pan-Amazonian governance, given the new discoveries of offshore oil exploration in Guyana, in partnership with the US, Suriname is starting similar exploration, with French investment, and Venezuela, long dependent on oil exploration and relatively isolated in the region, is becoming more dependent on China[5].

Domestic difficulties tend to undermine Brazil's credibility in the transition to a low-carbon economy. The National Congress is largely opposed to environmental protection due to the strength of the ruralist caucus, which has strong ties to Bolsonaro's supporters. Several proposed measures have highlighted the conflict

5 Cf. Diogo Ives, Julia Reis, Guilherme Fritz, and Matheus Petrelli, 'Paths of the left to Pan-Amazonian governance: A comparison between the Petro and Lula 3 administrations', *OPSA Bulletin*, no. 1, Jan-Mar, 2005, pp. 37-46.

of views between the executive and legislative branches on related issues, and even the parties in the governing coalition do not necessarily follow the government's positions. The progressive weakening of the executive branch vis-à-vis Congress is a complex matter that goes beyond the environmental issue.

Furthermore, even within the executive branch, differences of opinion persist regarding oil exploration in the Equatorial Margin, and a significant part of the executive branch advocates opening new fronts for fossil fuel exploration in the region. The Ministry of the Environment has been most affected by this difference of opinion. The problem is that Brazil may arrive at COP30 in November with its credibility seriously affected. A recent shameful incident, in a testimony by Minister of the Environment Marina Silva before the Senate, exposed the senators' prejudiced, sexist, and misogynistic views. President Lula's immediate reaction of support ended up strengthening the minister's position within the government, the greatest national symbol of the struggle for ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy. The COP30 conference in November will be a moment that will call into question Brazil's credibility with more ambitious goals.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

In the past, differences in material and symbolic power were the main determinants of the degree of influence of external

forces on a weaker country. For various reasons, the most fragile countries were dependent on the strongest ones. The degree of isolation could also vary for countless reasons. The phenomenal development of new internet and information technologies has made all countries subject to often uncontrollable external forces. Certainly, economic and financial dependence between countries has not diminished, but today it would be practically impossible for a country to isolate itself completely, even North Korea. Currently, the inequality between nations is abysmal, with the richest portion living practically in private, self-regulated spaces. But even these spaces are subject to this "invasion" of networks.

With the end of the Cold War and the globalization of capitalism, the overlap between foreign and domestic issues has expanded enormously with the internationalization of civil societies. This phenomenon has led to the politicization of issues that were previously considered the purview of the state and foreign policy. As a result, foreign policy agendas are increasingly part of the domestic debate and politicize international issues.

One of the phenomena of the current international situation that is affecting the domestic dynamics of countries in general is the expansion of right-wing and far-right governments that are connected globally. Already in his first term, Donald Trump encouraged the formation of these global networks. With his return to power, these connections are certain to expand and represent a threat to existing democracies, including Brazil's.

Marianna Albuquerque is a professor at the Institute of International Relations and Defense at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (IRID-UFRJ). She is a Senior Fellow at the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI). She is a Raisina Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF-India). She holds a postdoctorate in Military Science (ECEME) and a doctorate and master's degree in Political Science (Iesp-Uerj).

1 What is Brazil's room for maneuver and the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

It is undeniable that disputes between the United States and China will permeate the international insertion of all other actors in the system. Given the financial, commercial, diplomatic, and military power of the two powers, it is impossible to imagine a scenario in which potential disagreements and disputes between them will pass unscathed. However, having a context driven by this dispute does not mean having a future conditioned by such a division.

In recent decades, the realignment of the balance of power in the system has been marked by the emergence of new actors, which has led to the creation of alternative institutions, regional

integration projects, and leadership opportunities in niches of the international agenda. In all these cases, Brazil stands out as one of the actors with the potential to promote its own strategy—albeit inevitably influenced by the systemic conditions of the moment.

Historically, with a few exceptions later interpreted as isolated ruptures, Brazil has adopted a foreign policy approach marked by pragmatism rather than purely value-driven. This strategy has allowed the country not to close doors to those who are different or limit our partnerships and interactions to like-minded countries. Thus, despite maintaining close and strategic relations with the United States—interactions that go beyond the proximity between the occupants of the federal executive branch, given that there is a strong relationship between private sectors, subnational entities, and civil society organizations—we have maintained channels of dialogue, trade, and political coordination with other states that adopt disparate international and domestic practices, such as China and Russia. It is in this plurality of engagements that Brazil's greatest opportunity lies to maximize its interests in the face of growing geopolitical disputes.

2 What impact could participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

My interpretation is that Brazil's participation in BRICS is only seen as detrimental to the country's international image by those who misinterpret Brazil's objectives in the group. Broadly speak-

ing, the demands of BRICS are neither new nor unprecedented in Brazilian foreign policy. Issues such as institutional reform and increasing the representation of developing countries have been pillars of Brazil's foreign policy since the 19th century, which deepened after World War II and the establishment of organizations such as the United Nations (UN), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)—later transformed into the World Trade Organization (WTO)—and the Bretton Woods financial institutions. It is not BRICS, therefore, that inaugurates this agenda for Brazil.

It is undeniable, however, that BRICS is driving this agenda, albeit through means that were already part of Brazil's diplomatic strategy: the formation of alliances between countries with converging interests. Converging interests should not be understood as consensual or fully aligned. For Brazil, the existence of different points of view is an asset, not a liability, for international engagement. Thus, BRICS can—and in practice does—mean something different to each of its members. If, for Russia, it may be one of the few open channels for its multilateral projection after the invasion of Ukraine, for India it may be a space for building mutual trust with countries in the Middle East and Asia, as well as a way to counterbalance China's interests. For Brazil, it can mean a group through which we defend the narrative that the order established in 1945 is not in line with the correlation of forces and challenges of 2025. All of these objectives are valid, and to assume that one country in the bloc has complete control over the agenda in a group that decides by consensus is, in my view, to disregard the fact that everyone comes to the negotiating table with their own demands

and uses the mechanisms available to diplomatically influence and direct the group's path.

3 Is the concept of the Global South appropriate for guiding Brazilian foreign policy?

In international relations, no concept has an owner. Once a country proposes a certain term as a way of interpreting reality, new readings and uses by different authors have the capacity to alter, reorder, or redefine the content initially proposed. In the case of the concept of the Global South, it was originally—and Brazil was one of its proponents—a new way of classifying countries based on their interests and capacities for international integration. Previous categories, such as First/Second/Third World, fell into disuse with the end of the Cold War, and other terms such as developing countries and emerging markets had an economic focus that no longer served their purposes. The Global South, therefore, was a geopolitical category that grouped together countries outside the developed world which, in addition to their economic potential, demonstrated a willingness (albeit with varying capacities and levels of activity) to play a more defining role in global governance.

From the outset, however, the term was questioned academically. The questions came from the very constitution of the concept: how can it be "global" if the term "South" itself already denotes a partial scope? Apart from that, every concept requires its counter-concept: do other countries see themselves as a

"Global North"? How can countries with profiles and capacities as divergent as India, the world's fifth largest economy and a nuclear power, and small islands such as Palau be grouped together in the "South" bloc?

Despite academic differences, it is important to emphasize that, politically, the Global South functions as a "unifier" of narratives for countries such as the BRICS. If understood in its most basic form, as a group of countries that are not covered by the traditional categories of great powers and demand more space in the order, there is no scenario in which Brazil is not part of the Global South. Therefore, although imperfect and riddled with contradictions, it is a concept that fits in with the broad outlines of Brazilian foreign policy objectives.

4 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

Brazil should position itself as it has already been doing: 1) using diplomatic negotiation mechanisms to minimize damage; 2) maintaining cordial and open relations, despite disagreements; 3) diversifying and expanding partnerships so as not to depend exclusively on the United States in any economic or political sector. Since Trump is not under electoral pressure for reelection and firmly believes that he was reappointed to office because of aggressive policies in areas ranging from migration to tariffs, it

was expected that, at the beginning of his term, he would adopt measures considered to be extreme. However, the reality of politics prevails. If the announced measures worsen the domestic economic scenario—and the midterm elections may signal such setbacks—a change of course will be necessary. Many of these changes are already being made, such as the reduction of tariffs after negotiations and retaliations.

5 What should Brazil's position be toward authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

For Brazilian diplomacy, historically, there is a fine line between condemning regimes that violate principles that are dear to us, such as respect for human rights, and ensuring the primacy of non-interference in the internal affairs of our neighbors. Therefore, a path we have taken at other times in history has been to address the issue within the multilateral institutions of which we are a part, without, however, adopting radical positions of expulsion or imposing unilateral sanctions—measures that, according to Brazil, have adverse effects on civilians and close channels of dialogue that are useful for normalizing relations.

The case closest to us, and of most direct interest to Brazilian foreign policy, is Venezuela. In previous moments of disruption to democratic order, we chose to support Venezuela's temporary suspension from organizations such as Mercosur and Unasur, mobilizing the Ushuaia and Georgetown Protocols, respectively, until

the return to constitutional order. In the most recent crisis, after numerous allegations of fraud and Nicolás Maduro's refusal to make the election records available after the dispute with Edmundo González, we maintained our position of only recognizing the government after the public disclosure of the documents. This was not a unanimous position among Brazil's top officials, which led to internal disputes, but it was the official position, which remains unchanged. The same rigor was adopted after Venezuela's threats to annex the Essequibo territory, part of Guyana. Any possibility of transit through Brazilian territory was immediately rejected.

In summary, I believe that the stance should be an improvement on what we have been doing: condemning violations of democratic order, but without closing existing diplomatic channels; using multilateral institutions with legitimacy for possible "punishments," rather than unilateral actions; aligning the narrative within the government to prevent different public figures from expressing contradictory messages externally—which increases the degree of insecurity and reduces the reliability of Brazil's position.

6 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

Certainly, especially because it not only affects the international order, but is also a constitutional principle enshrined in our 1988 Constitution. Brazil adheres to and subscribes to various

international commitments that reinforce and multilateralize this objective, and in recent years, we have given several examples of how maintaining democracy and protecting minorities are a priority for maintaining our republican order.

Doubts about this issue usually arise when we interact with countries that adopt deviant practices. In my interpretation, Brazilian diplomacy believes that we will only be able to positively influence the adoption of practices that converge with ours if we establish bonds of trust and dialogue with countries that propagate other values. This strategy is not without its critics, but limiting partners to countries that adopt similar models has not proven to be an effective strategy throughout history. Attempts at regime change by force have led to some of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes we have ever experienced. The use of "double standards" when classifying governments—considering some as dictatorships with which no ties should be maintained (e.g., North Korea), and others as authoritarian but integrated into the system (e.g., Saudi Arabia)—has also caused numerous distortions. It is worth remembering that democratic governments also violate human rights and should be equally held accountable, monitored, and observed.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

In a world where power projection occurs mainly from niches, the climate and environment regime is undoubtedly one of the channels through which Brazil has the most competitive advantage to express itself and insert itself as a leader. We are home to an immense forest cover, diverse biomes, and large water and mineral reserves. Brazil is a necessary interlocutor on such issues, and historically we have not hesitated to take the lead, as in the case of Rio92, the seminal conference on climate goals that led to the signing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The inherent contradictions in the pursuit of environmental protection in a capitalist model are associated with the need to ensure development. Since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, Brazil has allied itself with developing countries in defending the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," according to which greenhouse gas reduction targets should be based on historical emissions and the need to transfer resources to finance the transition of relatively less developed countries to a low-carbon model. This does not mean, however, that these countries should be exempt from commitments, but rather that the burden sharing should take into account equity and historical contributions to the current climate emergency, in order to ensure the right to development.

Unlike the main emitters of greenhouse gases—the United States, China, and India top the list—whose energy sector is primarily responsible for national emissions, Brazil's main challenge is to curb emissions from land use, especially deforestation and agriculture. The relatively low concentration of emissions in the energy sector, in addition to the primacy of development, have been used as arguments (by various sectors, both domestic (e.g., civil society) and foreign) to justify Brazil's position (criticized internationally, for example by the Colombian government and European governments) of exploring new sources of fossil fuels, including in the Amazon Basin. The negative image that such a stance engenders has been mobilized to criticize the limits of Brazil's engagement and promises to be one of the major challenges for COP30, which will be hosted in Belém in November 2025.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

Although international issues have historically had little electoral impact, this scenario has changed recently. Polarization around relations with Cuba, Venezuela, and China, on the one hand, and unconditional alignment with the United States, on the other, has had repercussions in the domestic debate, including at the parliamentary level. Although these issues generate ideological identifications and are mobilized rhetorically, I believe that elections are still decided by perceptions of short-term performance on the domestic front, such as economic

data, the perception of wage recovery, security, health, education, and transportation.

In a context in which the divisions between domestic and foreign affairs are gradually dissipating, international issues can impact domestic elements—such as inflationary processes caused by tariffs or disruptions in international trade. However, I do not believe that the average citizen systematically considers this cause-and-effect relationship when deciding how to vote. The current government tends to be held responsible for any damage or benefits and is individually punished or held accountable for this at election time.

Rubens Ricupero, a retired diplomat, was ambassador to Washington, Geneva, and Rome, Minister of the Environment and the Amazon, Minister of Finance, and Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Born in São Paulo, he graduated in Law from the University of São Paulo and is the author of several books and essays, the most recent being *'A diplomacia na construção do Brasil'* (Versal, 2017) and *'Memórias'* (Ed. Unesp, 2024).

1 How much room for maneuver does Brazil have and what are the possibilities for defending its national interests in the face of the confrontation between the United States and China?

Brazil's room for maneuver obviously depends on the characteristics of what I prefer to call opposition or antagonism, rather than confrontation. It will be broader if the dispute is limited to the bilateral arena. Restrictions on China in terms of investment, technology, or US tariffs only affect us indirectly. They may become a challenge for Brazilian companies that use US technology and inputs, such as Embraer, if the dispute evolves into situations where Washington requires these companies to cut technological ties with China. When we talk about confrontation, what we have in mind is a return to a

kind of new Cold War, like the one between the US and the USSR. The parallel, even if unspoken, is dangerous, as the differences are greater than the similarities. The Cold War was, in essence, a global ideological struggle, which currently exists only in an incipient and dubious form. China is already the main trading partner of more than 120 countries, in contrast to the Soviet Union's lack of relevance in trade. The Cold War had a basic stability that came from an unspoken respect for exclusive spheres of influence, something that doesn't exist today. The antagonism between the US and China is more like what existed between the UK and Germany before 1914—a national rivalry in which it's harder to demand alignment from third parties than in ideological conflicts. Even during the Cold War, Brazil refused to align itself with its Independent Foreign Policy. Now more than ever, it is in our interest to join forces with similar countries to resist the tendency, of Trump or others, to replace the multilateral system with a return to the world of power. It is still too early to predict whether the antagonism between the US and China will come close to what the Cold War was. For countries like Brazil, which are neither nuclear nor conventional military powers, the primary interest is to defend the multilateral order, even if imperfect, as it is the only condition that allows us to exert some influence over global decisions.

2 What impact could participation in BRICS have on Brazilian foreign policy?

On the Brazilian government's official website, BRICS is defined as a "group of countries (...) considered a relevant forum for

political and diplomatic coordination (...) a space for cooperation and consultation among countries in the Global South with the aim of discussing issues on the international agenda." The concept is in constant flux, having grown from the original four members (BRIC) to include, first South Africa, then Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, as well as so-called "partner countries" and more than 30 aspirants. The mere enumeration of members and partners is enough to indicate the extreme heterogeneity of the group. Perhaps it is easier to define its character by what *it is not* than by what *it is*: no Western country or advanced economy is part of the group, none is obviously a member of NATO, and almost no Latin American countries are members, except for Cuba and Bolivia, which have a minor position as partners. This makes it questionable to take the BRICS as synonymous with the Global South, unless almost all of Latin America is eliminated from that zone. To varying degrees, all members are countries dissatisfied with the international *status quo* and their own *status* within it, that is, they are revisionists of the international order, although few come close to the radicalism of pariah Iran or Russia, nostalgic for the Soviet Union. The next BRICS summit may be useful insofar as such a disparate group achieves common positions in the search for better global governance. What would this "global governance" look like? Effective progress in addressing global problems such as climate change and pandemic prevention, for example. How can this be done when the group includes China, the world's largest polluter, and the unclear origin of Covid-19? It is pointless to talk about democratization and human rights in view of the group's disturbing composition. The original idea of improving the governance

of the Bretton Woods institutions loses relevance at a time when, in the face of Trump, there are fears for the survival of the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. By hosting the summit, Brazil would be rewarded if it managed to reinforce the prospects of COP 30 by raising the level of ambition of national commitments, thus counterbalancing Trump's negative impact. In general, for the BRICS and for Brazil, the biggest challenge is to react to the weakening of multilateralism and prevent the disappearance of the only sector in which unarmed countries can exert some influence.

3 Is the concept of the Global South appropriate for guiding Brazilian foreign policy?

What has been said above about the BRICS can be repeated in relation to the Global South, although the two concepts do not completely overlap. The Brazilian government's official website states that "the Global South refers to developing or emerging countries, most of which are located in the southern hemisphere." It thus chose to define the group by what was formerly called "underdeveloped" status, rather than by political characteristics. This status is only one of the traits that define Brazil's foreign policy. We are a developing country (albeit with a high intermediate per capita income of around US$9,000). But we are also a country with a Western historical and cultural heritage, in contrast to most other members of the Global South. We are a Latin American country, which is underrepresented in the BRICS. We have inherited much of our way of life and culture from the indigenous peoples. In addition to being Western in terms

of culture, values, and aspirations, we have very strong ethnic and cultural ties to Africa. In terms of aspirations, we feel closer to the ideals of democracy and social welfare in Europe than in the United States. We could add other traits, but these are enough to indicate the complexity and richness of Brazil's international profile, which cannot and should not be reduced to just one of its dimensions. That is why the idea of belonging to the Global South needs to be combined and balanced with the other dimensions of our personality. On the other hand, for a country like Brazil, whose ability to influence international decisions depends essentially on multilateral action, the concept of the Global South offers valuable potential to be exploited to the full, as always, without prejudice to other relevant dimensions. In a way, Brazil is the most "global" of Latin American countries, which opens up interesting prospects for us, including if there is ever a real possibility of expanding the United Nations Security Council to give it greater representativeness.

4 Should the defense of democracy and human rights be a relevant part of Brazil's agenda in international forums?

In relation to this question, I would like to point out that we are one of the few countries whose written constitution explicitly prescribes the principles that should govern the country's international conduct. In our case, Article 4 of the 1988 Constitution states that the country's international relations should be governed by the principles of independence, prevalence of human rights,

self-determination, non-intervention, equality among states, defense of peace, peaceful resolution of conflicts, repudiation of terrorism and racism, cooperation among peoples, and the granting of political asylum, in addition to a paragraph on Latin America, which I will comment on in another question.

Therefore, the defense of human rights is not a matter of choice or preference, but rather a requirement explicitly stated in the Constitution. Democracy, in turn, is implicit in the spirit of this article. This has extremely important implications. For example, the foreign policy of the dark era of Bolsonaro-Ernesto Araújo was not only a monstrosity in terms of diplomatic error, but also represented a clearly unconstitutional policy, which should be denounced, as it was, by a group of which I was a part of, including in the courts.

How to make this defense effective is a matter to be decided on a case-by-case basis. Preference should not be given to unilateral approaches, but rather to denouncing violations in the competent international and inter-American forums under the various human rights conventions in force.

5 How should Brazil position itself in the face of the Trump administration's potentially aggressive stance toward Latin America?

Returning to the Brazilian Constitution, the Sole Paragraph of Article 4 states: The Federative Republic of Brazil shall seek the

economic, political, social, and cultural integration of the peoples of Latin America, with a view to forming a Latin American community of nations. I believe that this paragraph makes it clear that Brazil's Latin Americanist and integrationist vocation is not optional, but a constitutional requirement. An obligation to do more necessarily includes the obligation to do less. Brazilian foreign policy has a duty to oppose any aggressive stance by Trump or any other source towards Latin America.

6 What should Brazil's position be toward authoritarian regimes in Latin America?

Out of loyalty to our constitutional principles and political ideals, Brazil must act proactively to promote democracy and respect for the law and elections through initiatives such as the inclusion of a "democratic clause" in the groups of which it is a member and the encouragement of dialogue and understanding between opposing factions in Latin American countries. Even in the face of the rejection of democratic solutions, the solution is not to break off relations, isolate, or intervene, but rather to stand firm in defending democratic solutions. When necessary, serious violations must be reported to the appropriate forums of the United Nations and international organizations. Such reports are provided for in human rights agreements and conventions and cannot be interpreted as foreign intervention in matters of national sovereignty.

7 Should Brazil take a leading role in climate and environmental negotiations by committing to ambitious goals in the transition to a low-carbon economy?

There is no doubt that, for Brazil, this is one of those fortunate situations in which what is right, from the ethical point of view of the common interest of humanity, also corresponds to specific national comparative advantages. It has already been mentioned that we are not a nuclear or conventional military power. Nor are we among the economies that have benefited most from globalization through global value chains, unlike the Asian countries. On the other hand, we are an environmental, energy, and food supply power. More than 80% of our electricity generation comes from clean and renewable sources, primarily hydroelectric, followed by solar, wind, and biomass. The potential of the latter has barely been tapped, even though Brazil is the only country in the world that has maintained a clean fuel program—sugarcane ethanol—on a scale of millions of vehicles for more than 40 years. The costly and difficult transition from coal to clean sources for China and India costs Brazil nothing. If we want to regain the position we had during the years of rapid expansion from 1950 to 1982, our best hope for rebuilding comparative advantages lies in the environmental, clean and renewable energy, and food production sectors. In this sector, we still face two unresolved challenges: the dependence of transportation, especially road transportation, on fossil fuels (diesel) and the most difficult of all, the Amazon. In transportation, the solution is within reach: large-scale increases in biodiesel produc-

tion from biomass. In the Amazon, the problem is how to make the aspiration of making the standing forest more valuable than its destruction for cattle ranching a practical and effective reality. There are promising ideas in the bioeconomy based on forest resources, but they are still on an insufficient scale. In this regard, COP30 would make all the difference if it were able to advance innovative formulas for international cooperation, such as making the Paris Agreement's tradable carbon certificate mechanism operational, the REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) mechanism, payment for environmental services provided by the forest, etc.

8 How might the new international scenario influence Brazil's internal political dynamics?

It is clear that the most obvious way will be through an alliance between Bolsonaro's far-right and Trump's retrograde and repressive regime. The ongoing attempts in this direction are public knowledge: the actions of Brazilian politicians with the Executive and Legislative branches in Washington; the note from a sector of the US State Department on an internal Brazilian matter, duly responded to by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the threats of measures in the US Congress against ministers of the Brazilian Supreme Court; criticism of measures to protect our democratic process, such as the declaration of ineligibility of certain politicians and court decisions against the dissemination of fake news on social media platforms.

It is possible that, at some point, especially as the 2026 elections approach, threats of this kind will intensify. They may eventually materialize in the form of commercial, economic, and political sanctions directed either against the Federal Supreme Court, preferably, or against the Executive Branch. Situations such as the one outlined above could, in the extreme, lead to serious internal divisions in the country and would require Brazilian institutions to be prepared and united to make use of all the legitimate instruments for protecting democracy provided by the Brazilian constitution and laws.

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