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Breaking the Mold: Brazil's Foreign Policy Insights

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ABSTRACT

Brazilian foreign policy studies have traditionally focused on the institutional role of Itamaraty, often overlooking the influence of academia in shaping diplomatic debates. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has historically led policy formulation, academic actors have contributed with intellectual frameworks that shape diplomatic strategies. This article examines how the relationship between these two spheres has evolved and identifies key moments of engagement and conflict. The study employs a qualitative, historical analysis based on process tracing, examining four critical periods of Brazilian foreign policy through academic literature, policy discussions, and interviews with diplomats and scholars. The findings suggest that academic contributions have reinforced official foreign policy narratives in moments of alignment, whereas in periods of divergence, they have challenged state-led frameworks and informed changes in Brazil's international positioning. This study highlights the complex interplay between intellectual production and diplomatic practice, offering a more nuanced understanding of the forces shaping Brazil's global strategy.

1 | Introduction

Throughout the 20th century, academic knowledge played a significant role in shaping public policy, with its influence growing as research became more professionalized and autonomous. This shift allowed academia to distance itself from government-driven agendas and act as a creative force in policymaking. While there has been much analysis of the influence of academic knowledge of foreign policy formation, most of this study has been North-centric. Anglophone academia, particularly in the United States and Western Europe, has dominated these discussions and produced most theoretical frameworks for foreign policy analysis. Meanwhile, the Global South has often remained an object of study rather than an active producer of knowledge, with its foreign policy primarily examined through Northern lenses (Chakrabarty 2000; Connell 2007).

In South America, research has mainly focused on regional powers such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, analyzing their foreign policy shifts and the effects of international relations schools of thought on their external strategies (see Deciancio 2024; Milani 2021; Sarquís 2024). In the case of Brazil, scholars have studied its diplomatic tradition and global influence, but the role of academia as an independent and creative force in foreign policy debates has received far less attention. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (known popularly as Itamaraty) has historically

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shaped the country's international positioning, academic actors have also provided intellectual frameworks that inform diplomatic strategies. This article examines their influence on the foreign policymaking process.

Against this background, this article reassesses the synergies and frictions between Itamaraty and academia in shaping the country's international actions and narratives from the second half of the 20th century to the first quarter of the 21st century. Furthermore, it shows how critical academic debates have dismantled certain state narratives, highlighted alternative moments and concepts in Brazil's international relations history, and influenced foreign policy changes.

To explore this relationship in depth, this article is structured as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework and research design that guide this study. The third section examines the historical foundations of Brazilian diplomatic and academic thought, focusing on the imperial era, the legacy of the Baron of Rio Branco, and the influence of *varguismo*. The fourth section examines the professionalization of diplomacy and academic thought from 1950 to 1985. The fifth section analyzes the period of re-democratization and pluralization of foreign policy debates. The sixth section discusses the disengagement and hyper-ideologization of academic–government relations over the last decade. Finally, the concluding remarks outline the main findings and their wider implications for the relationship between academic knowledge and foreign policy formulation.

2 | Theoretical Framework and Research Design

In the 20th century, Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs underwent a significant institutional change. According to Cheibub (1985), it involved a shift from a patrimonialist administration, in which the institutions were indistinguishable from the diplomats, to a rational-legal bureaucratic structure. This transformation occurred alongside a deep shift in the international system that prevailed post-World War II. The establishment and maintenance of multilateral institutional spaces for dialog demanded that policymakers acquire expertise to facilitate their countries' participation in the new order. In Brazil, the Ministry led an intense reflection on the role the Federation should play in this order and the strategies needed to achieve this goal. This process was accompanied by the development of an independent epistemic space within the country's academic institutions.

In recent years, scholarly interest in the ideational factors that shape Brazilian foreign policy has grown considerably. This *historical legacy* (Cervo 2008) plays a central role in Brazil's diplomatic framework and academic debates. Yet, epistemic divergences within and across institutions inform competing narratives of this legacy, rendering it neither uniform nor uncontested. Within Itamaraty, ideological factions influence decision making—with autonomists advocating alignment with the Global South, pragmatic institutionalists favoring integration into liberal international regimes, and Americanists prioritizing ties with Washington (Crescentino and Caballero 2021; Saraiva 2020)—tensions whose historical development this article explores.

Despite these divergences, the academic literature generally identifies a set of rhetorical principles that have remained central to Brazilian foreign policy across different historical phases. Although these principles have been contested and reinterpreted over time, they contribute to the construction of a cohesive narrative that stabilizes Brazil's fluctuating stance in international relations. As a strategic compass, they inform foreign policy decisions across successive administrations, creating a sense of continuity that reinforces the perception of a coherent state policy and thereby mitigates potential opposition or criticism.

This overarching narrative embodies Brazil's universalist orientation and ambition to be a significant actor in global politics, expressed through a commitment to multilateralism, pacifism, noninterventionism, corporation and bridge-building, defense of sovereign equality among nations, nonconfrontation, self-determination, adherence to international legal frameworks, and pragmatism (Lessa 1998; Lima 2005; Ricupero 2000; Silva 1998). Together, these principles reflect Brazil's enduring commitment to fostering stable and cooperative international relations.

Over time, ongoing epistemic and political dialogs have revisited and refined this foundational framework, enhancing its coherence and adaptability. Such evolution contributed to the enshrinement of historical diplomatic tenets within the 1988 Constitution, which expanded Brazil's guiding values in global affairs. Among them are democracy, human rights, environmental stewardship, nuclear nonproliferation, and efforts to combat organized crime (Lampreia 1998, 14).

Thus, despite growing criticism, there is a certain consensus on the high degree of professionalization, autonomy, bureaucratic isolation, and, at least until the 1990s, Itamaraty's monopoly on the design and implementation of foreign policy (Cason and Power 2009). As Milani and Pinheiro (2017, 293) argue, this institution should be analyzed as the *locus par excellence* of Brazilian international thought, highlighting its importance for the construction of national identity, its dialog with academic production, and the consequences of this legacy for the production of foreign policy. In this sense, it represents the institutional basis for a narrative of continuity and consensus on foreign policy orientations among the country's political and economic forces as state policy, despite successive changes and inflections (Lima 1994, 27; Silva 1995, 142).

While the concentration of diplomats within the international relations epistemic community has facilitated the construction of an official narrative of Brazilian foreign policy, academia has played an increasingly significant role since the mid-20th century. This involvement has helped reinforce the official narrative even as it has contributed to alternative interpretations that shape and critique it. As in Itamaraty, divergences over the interpretation of foreign policy exist within academia, where competing schools of thought have emerged.

According to Caballero and Crescentino (2020), these perspectives differ in their understanding of the historical processes that have shaped Brazil's foreign policy. Drawing from the broader intellectual contributions of Cervo and Bueno on

structural processes, the Brasília and São Paulo schools emphasize long-term historical forces and nation building as central to Brazil's diplomatic trajectory. By contrast, influenced by the work of Maria Regina Soares de Lima and Gerson Moura, the Rio de Janeiro school approaches foreign policy as a public policy shaped by multiple actors and contingent political contexts, often challenging the notion of historical continuity. Although these scholarly debates frequently intersect with Itamaraty's internal disputes, they also shape policy formulation by providing conceptual frameworks that legitimize strategic choices and adapt foreign policy narratives to evolving contexts. The coexistence of these contrasting perspectives has further expanded research agendas, offering a more comprehensive understanding of Brazil's external behavior through domestic and systemic variables.

Beyond these debates on Brazil's foreign policy history, scholars have also examined the broader conceptual foundations structuring research in international relations in the country. Milani et al. (2017) identify three interrelated frameworks shaping the field—the tension between different strands of Americanist (pragmatic and ideological) and globalist (Hobbesian and Grotian) perspectives, the politics of national development, and the quest for autonomy. These frameworks have informed alternative periods of the development of international relations studies in Brazil, such as those proposed by Casarões (2018), examining the link between academics and practitioners, and Pecequilo (2017), focusing on the institutionalization of international studies in Brazilian universities.

These approaches, however, tend to both reproduce and constrain the discourses surrounding the specificity of Brazilian foreign policy. The development of this academic field has gone through several stages, each shaped by the unique dynamics of the modern Brazilian state; the strategic maneuvers of local, national, and regional elites; and the character of Brazilian academic institutions. In addition, this development has been significantly influenced by intellectual currents from Europe and the United States, through which various scientific disciplines have gained academic legitimacy in Brazil.

This study uses a process-tracing methodology to analyze four key periods in developing Brazilian foreign policy (FP), its academic research, and the link between scholarship and practice. It triangulates data from primary and secondary sources based on a comprehensive review of scholarly publications, policy debates, and legal documents, as well as interviews with Brazilian diplomats and international relations scholars conducted between 2019 and 2021.

3 | Planting Seeds: The Empire, the Baron Myth, and Varguismo

Analogous to what was happening internationally, from the imperial period until the mid-20th century, incipient studies of Brazil's international relations were characterized by an ontology committed to the strengthening of modern institutions and a methodology marked by the Rankean "fetishism" of facts and documents.[1] It had two intertwined but distinct effects. On the one hand, it contributed to modern state building and legitimation in its regional and international projection, training and socializing bureaucrats and academics in light of a common doctrine of national thought (Jatobá 2013, 33–34; Milani 2021, 16). On the other hand, the emphasis of classical historiography and law on official sources led to an analysis based mainly on the agency of individual decisionmakers (the president, the foreign minister, and the secretary general) and state institutions (Itamaraty) (Milani and Pinheiro 2017, 278).

Together, these variables fostered several peculiarities that have left their mark on international relations knowledge production. First, the lack of autonomy of the academic field in relation to other spheres of power gave shape to a process of mutual osmosis between political and intellectual activity,[2] which helped establish a strong influence of diplomatic history (later transferred to the history of international relations) on other disciplines in the humanities and applied social sciences (Almeida 1999b, 119). Second, it was precisely during this period that Itamaraty's own story nested the rhetorical foundations of Brazil's international identity.

Founded as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and War with the transfer of the Portuguese Imperial Court in 1808, the definitive conformation of the Secretariat of State for Foreign Affairs as part of the Brazilian Empire dates to 1823, linked directly to the configuration of Brazil as a political community independent of the metropolis. Moreover, the peculiarity of the independence process of a stable, large, lusophone monarchy in a continent of fragmented Hispanic republics gave Itamaraty the role of guarantor of the international image of continuity and defender of the country's diplomatic singularities. Indeed, the imperial authorities spared no resources to preserve this imaginary early on, making the protection of its historical memory effective with the creation of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs State Archive in 1828 (Lafer 2018).

This condition was reflected in an equally unchanging foreign policy narrative. The Secretariat became the institutional link between Brazil and the outside world through a representation that was not only legal and political, but also symbolic. This process reached its climax with the generation of 1870, which included the most important diplomatic intellectuals of the late Empire and early Republic, such as Joaquim Nabuco, José Maria da Silva Paranhos Júnior (the "Baron of Rio Branco") and Manuel de Oliveira Lima, founders of the narratives and practices associated with the exercise of modern Brazilian diplomacy (Pinheiro and Vedoveli 2012). Endowed with a utilitarian perception of knowledge about the country's international relations, their production focused on the temporal circumstances of foreign policy agendas (Milani 2021, 4).

In this context, the main product and agent of the moment of transition of the Secretariat into a Ministry in 1891 was personified by the Baron of Rio Branco, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1902 to 1912 (Silva 1995, 97). Responding to the challenges of his time, the baron laid the foundations for a narrative of continuity that continues to shape the institution's identity, linking it to pacifism and jurisprudence, rooted in a realist conception based on the principle of legal equality between sovereign states. These rhetorical strategies materialized through the resolution of border and geopolitical

conflicts, the management of bilateral relations with its unstable neighbors, and the engagement with global powers. Central to both factors was the establishment of an "unwritten alliance" with the United States (Burns 1966), which provided Brazil with an alternative means of achieving a degree of autonomy from the influence of two historically dominant European powers—Britain and Portugal.

Such a pragmatism of preventive defense, the acquisition of power, and the neutralization of obstacles to the country's economic and social development allowed Brazilian diplomats to project a universalism embodied in their own South American version of the manifest destiny: the call to occupy a central role in the international sphere (Corrêa 2000, 28). In fact, this period marked the beginning of the professionalization of Itamaraty as a state agency, centralizing an undisputed monopoly of foreign policy. From that moment on, every reformulation of the rhetorical phase of Brazil's international identity was in dialog with the principles designed around the baron's mythological theoretical instruments (Ricupero 2000).

From the 1920s, sociocultural and political transformations in Brazil provided the basis for the gradual establishment of modern social sciences and humanities in national educational institutions (Jatobá 2013, 34). In this context, the unprecedented eagerness to analyze the cosmopolitan order of the interwar period was confronted with the perspective of international law, which was still deeply tied to the political elites present in Itamaraty. Still, the Brazilian modernist avant-garde favored the opening of spaces for debate, which were soon integrated into the brand-new public universities. This combination consisted in a clear respect for new theoretical worldviews that interacted directly with the French structuralist academy.[3] Additionally, while the Annales School was emerging, authors such as Caio Prado Júnior, Gilberto Freyre, and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda were analyzing Brazilian multiculturalism in light of a concern for multidimensionality close to the later Braudelian total history (Almeida 1998, 50).

At the same time, the institutionalization of the redistributive and protectionist industrialization discourse, which had begun in the region during the interwar period, was facilitated by the exhaustion of the agro-export model that became apparent after the 1929 crisis. This new reality contributed to the state modernization promoted by the government of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945). The social fabric became more complex as the working and middle classes gained political power and the urban economy grew. Such a shift in the productive model was interpreted through the lens of modernization theories and entailed a change in the country's pattern of international integration. Yet, Itamaraty managed to frame this change as continuity within the narrative of universalism.

Following the establishment of sovereignty over the national territory and the consolidation of borders, the nascent strategy of national developmentalism emerged as the driving force behind foreign policy (Corrêa 2000). This trend did not mean a departure from pragmatism during the period of "pragmatic equidistance" (1935–1942) (Moura 1982) or from Americanism during the alignment phase (1942–1950). From then on, however, any action had to go through a process of legitimization, in which initiatives had to be in line with the country's development strategy. As a result, international engagement was redefined as a fundamental moment in the quest for autonomy (Caballero and Crescentino 2020). According to this perspective, industrialization became the primary objective of foreign policy, seen as essential to increase national wealth, reduce inequalities, and ultimately serve the interests of society as a whole, rather than just a specific group within it (Cervo 2008, 46).

This phenomenon was accompanied and complemented by a theoretical-analytical reformulation by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which influenced Latin American countries' development models of over the next three decades. The study of the international division of labor, structured around a polarized configuration of centers and peripheries as a byproduct of the deterioration of the terms of trade, made it possible to explain the political and structural asymmetries among states. These ideas linked the development model and international insertion strategies epistemologically in light of long-term historical processes (Lorenzini and Pereyra Doval 2013, 14). Such a multidimensional perspective enabled the identification of factors contributing to international violence, moving beyond the classical realist analysis of power struggles between states (Bernal-Meza 2006, 236). Thus, ECLAC developed a Latin American perspective on international relations, challenging the limited boundaries of knowledge rooted in Eurocentric views and tied to modern state institutions.

Caught up in this process of reflection, Brazilian international thought underwent a transformative shift. As Fonseca (2011, 54–55) suggests, this shift included an awareness that external mental and economic domination helped explain the limits of nationhood. Consequently, if such external subordination mirrored domestic patterns of control, the project of international insertion had to be addressed primarily through the domestic transformation of society. The achievement of national autonomy would naturally lead to the adoption of an appropriate diplomatic strategy. These ideas quickly captured the imagination of emerging scholars and were further explored through the establishment of specialized institutions.

Although the bureaucratic professionalization of the *Estado Novo* began in 1938, with the creation of the Administrative Department of the Civil Service, Itamaraty's system of recruiting and training diplomats managed to escape the centralization of the Vargas government. In 1945, the Instituto Rio Branco was created under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, leading to the gradual specialization of international relations studies in the country. Though originally defined as a research and teaching center, it was soon transformed into a diplomatic academy.

This new situation not only contributed to the process of autonomation of the Ministry since the 1950s, but also, according to Figueira (2010, 9), helped transform it into a center for socializing values, consolidating knowledge, promoting the formation of a group spirit, and sharing principles, which for a long time made Itamaraty a cohesive organization. At the same time, the greater official interest in the country's foreign policy

contributed to the emergence of spaces for research on international issues far from Itamaraty's direct influence, such as the course at the Rio de Janeiro Polytechnic School in 1947 or the War College in 1949 (Lopes et al. 2022).

4 | Growing Roots: Professionalising Diplomatic and Academic Thinking

In the 1950s, the influence of transnational academies on Brazilian international studies began to be felt in the reflection on Brazil. ECLAC ideas strongly influenced the *Fundação Getúlio Vargas' Instituto Brasileiro de Direito Público e Ciência Política* founded 1950, the *Instituto Brasileiro de Estudos Sociais e Políticos* founded 1953 (later, *Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros*), and the *Instituto Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais* founded 1954 since their inception.[4] Thus, the domestic political debate of the period between *nationalists* and *concessionists* reflected how the combination of national viability and international permissiveness was fundamental for countries like Brazil to achieve autonomy in the international arena (Jaguaribe 1979).

Mobilized by political rather than academic debate, the discipline of international relations witnessed the development of an embryonic tradition of reflection shaped by three main theoretical matrices—Marxist/dependency-based contributions, political realism, and geopolitical thought (Casarões 2018, 406; Lima 2013, 145). Interest in these topics was also evident in the field of history, where research reflected a shift from diplomatic history to a mixture of official and academic approaches, exemplified by the works of Hélio Vianna, José Honório Rodrigues and Carlos Delgado de Carvalho (Almeida 1998).

As Pinheiro and Vedoveli (2012) point out, the professionalization process of Brazilian diplomacy and the generation of academic spaces outside the immediate orbit of the Ministry led to a gradual separation between the two spheres. In this sense, although Itamaraty maintained a certain monopoly on the production and analysis of foreign policy, the socialization and acquisition of the *ethos* of the diplomatic corps brought about a change in the relationship between diplomats and the academic field. Encouraged by the Rio Branco Institute, Itamaraty members moved from the social position of intellectuals as diplomats to that of diplomats as intellectuals (Pinheiro and Vedoveli 2012, 223).

At the same time, the initial inability to produce autonomous knowledge within the International Relations discipline led to the creation of training programs shaped primarily by contributions from law and history. Nevertheless, diplomats' continued attachment to the academic sphere, and their extensive scholarly production allowed them to shape the field's identity significantly, reinforcing institutional myths in foreign policy analysis.

Thus, from its origins in the monarchical political context, its deepening through an autopoietic bureaucratic structure, and its subsequent academic theorization, every way of thinking about and positioning Brazil in the international arena was bound to dialog with a prevailing framework that, imbued with the traits of coherence and predictability, defined the parameters of normality and abnormality in Brazilian diplomatic action. Yet, it does not mean that the epistemic spaces of the Ministry and academia did not experience moments of association and dissociation, nor, as previously outlined, that the families and schools produced in one space did not have their counterparts in the other.

Among other things, in both spaces there was a breakdown of the ideal mechanism for eliminating center–periphery inequalities, based on the dosage between external and internal factors. Thus, while on the one hand there were advocates of developmentalism linked to the forces of international capitalism, on the other there were the defenders of autonomous national development.

Despite these differences, international cooperation between developed and developing countries emerged as a common theme for both perspectives and became the foundation of Brazilian international thought. Both positions reinforced universalism, pacifism, and the role of the developmental state in the rhetorical phase of Brazilian international identity (Crescentino 2021). Ultimately, national development as the guiding principle for international action took shape during the Quadros and Goulart administrations (1961–1964) and continued thereafter. Notably, this interpretation remained valid despite the turbulent regime changes and the escalating discord between Itamaraty and academia after the 1964 coup d'état, when academic reflections on diplomacy adopted a critical perspective toward the military government's foreign policy (Fonseca Junior and Uziel 2019, 151).

Meanwhile, until the 1960s, the expansion of the International Relations discipline had been constrained by a combination of 3 factors. First, as noted above, the symbiosis between academia and Itamaraty in foreign policy thinking limited theorizing in favor of utilitarianism. Second, US academic showed primacy in theoretical production, which was perceived domestically as part of the hemispheric leader's hegemonic project (Herz 2002, 15). Third, autonomist approaches arose that had been in vogue since the 1950s.

Given these dynamics, two external fronts were instrumental in promoting international relations during the dictatorship. The first was foreign funding, primarily through the Ford Foundation, which facilitated the establishment of postgraduate courses at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) in 1966, and at the *Instituto de Pesquisas do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (IUPERJ) in 1969.[5] The second was the provision of scholarships for young academics from these institutions to conduct research in the United States. This collaboration not only integrated Brazilian research into key disciplinary debates but also enhanced the visibility of local scholarship on the global stage. Over time, these developments would lay the groundwork for what, decades later, would become the Rio de Janeiro school (Bernal-Meza 2006), establishing an epistemic differentiation—rooted in the strong influence of US disciplines—that would emerge fully only after the field achieved institutional consolidation in Brazil.

The interaction with foreign academies also had significant repercussions for other domestic institutions. This financial

support contributed to the emergence of critical and independent spaces within Brazilian civil society. A notable example is the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP), founded in São Paulo in 1969, as a think tank fostering critical reflection among researchers displaced from university environments.

On a domestic level, the phase of "international power structure freezing" (Castro and de 1971) altered the structural landscape and shaped Brazilian foreign policy. This perspective gained further strength with the emergence of new currents of thought in political science, driven by the contributions of Hélio Jaguaribe and Celso Lafer, as well as their dissemination through the recently founded *Revista DADOS de Ciências Sociais*. Although this trend continued until the 1990s, various internal and external factors contributed to the institutionalization of international relations as an academic discipline from 1970 onward.

Internally, several factors were decisive. Following its participation in the 1964 coup d'état, the War College became a laboratory of ideas at the service of the military and the nerve center of official international thought (Milani 2021, 10). At the same time, intellectuals expelled by the dictatorship and educated in foreign academies contributed to the renewal of the Brazilian international relations environment, providing new debates from alternative theoretical frameworks such as structuralism, the English school, liberalism, and realism (Lopes et al. 2022).

Moreover, when the Ministry of Foreign Relations moved from the Itamaraty Palace to the Arcos Palace in 1970, its members came to perceive themselves differently from other segments of society (Moura 2007, 19). With the creation of the *Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão* (FUNAG) as an official think tank in 1971, Itamaraty incorporated into its structure a nonacademic space through which diplomats could coordinate and promote activities, research, and publications in the field of international relations.

Furthermore, academic institutions also transformed due to the fluctuating pressures exerted by the dictatorial government, which both stimulated their development for strategic reasons and censored their curricula (Jatobá 2013, 3). Additionally, a renewed interest in international issues emerged among new generations of intellectuals, driven by the growing international prestige of Brazilian power after the economic miracle, the gradual political liberalization under the Geisel government, and the centrality given to global affairs by his ecumenical and responsible pragmatism.

Of course, these intellectuals were interested not only in Brazil's international actions but also in its status as a developing country and its proactive behavior in the context of the crisis of US hegemony. This new environment became a vehicle for the agency of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries in the face of the structural constraints of the Cold War, motivating the emergence of a new common international agenda for southern countries (Herz 2002, 15).

To understand the autonomy framework of their foreign policies in the context of the Cold War, the search for theoretical perspectives that would provide analytical tools for decision making in these countries led to an unprecedented research agenda (Milani and Pinheiro 2017, 279–280). Ultimately, integrating these variables contributed to the understanding that, despite external domination, diplomatic behavior was sometimes independent of alignment with the powers. On the contrary, diversification in foreign relations supported the formulation of the national growth strategy (Fonseca Jr. 2011, 56–57).

Despite tensions between Itamaraty and academia, interest in these issues served as a basis for the institutionalization of the discipline. In 1974, the National University of Brasilia (UnB) launched the first undergraduate course in international relations in close collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus, beyond its role in training diplomats at the Instituto Rio Branco, its professors also contributed to the new program and the structuring of its curriculum (Fonseca Junior and Uziel 2019, 154). This demand led to the creation of the first postgraduate course at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in 1983. Similarly, in 1976, the history of international relations gained prominence when a new research area became part of the postgraduate history program at the University of Brasília, under the direction of José Honório Rodrigues (Santos 2005, 23), laying the foundations for what would later be known as the *Brasília school*.

This trend soon spread to Rio de Janeiro, where the international politics sections of the postgraduate program of the University Research Institute of Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ), the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUCRJ), and the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV) were created. Between 1977 and 1980, the city also saw many initiatives that led to the creation of the Brazilian Council on International Relations (CBRI), the Getúlio Vargas Foundation Centre for Contemporary Research and Documentation (CPDOC), and the Working Group on International Relations and Foreign Policy (GRIPE) of the National Association of Postgraduate Studies and Research in the Social Sciences (ANPOCS) (Miyamoto 1999, 86)[6].

Naturally, this process of institutionalization accelerated the intellectual divorce between the epistemic communities of diplomats and academics. As Almeida (1999a, 196–198) points out, on the practical side, Brazil's proactive action in the multilateral arena had a direct effect on the next generation of academically minded professionals, providing Itamaraty with its own research agenda. On the academia side, production showed an increasing pace and intensity, concentrated in the university centers of Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, São Paulo, and Porto Alegre. Although these institutions had different research priorities, they all shared a common denominator—a critical opposition to the traditional dominance of studies based on international law, diplomatic history, and specialized journalism. Each had left the characteristic stamp of the nature of its own narrative on the research of the previous phase (Salomón 2013, 83; Salomón and Pinheiro 2013, 49).

Meanwhile, as previously noted, the University of Brasília's efforts to institutionalize the history of international relations contributed to the strengthening of a national epistemic alternative to Anglo-Saxon readings, marking the foundation of what would later be known as the *Brasília school*. From the

instrumentalization of the concept of deep forces, Amado Luiz Cervo (1981) provided a progressive formation of Brazilian concepts for analyzing the country's international relations. In his own words, his research sought to avoid both the factual reconstruction of Brazilian foreign relations and the mystification of the personalism of historical decisions and events (Cervo 1981). In line with Renouvin's thought (see, e.g., Renouvin 1954), he formulated an alternative to episodic history, while reflecting on the ideational conditioning factors of foreign policy decisions (Franceschini 2020, 122).

According to Saraiva (2008, 54–55), this school of thought's methodological proposal revolutionized the use of traditional diplomatic sources by incorporating parliamentary and journalistic records, oral history, and discourse analysis. It also introduced new themes and factors into the field of history, such as public opinion and cultural history, as well as previously unexplored geographical horizons, including Brazil's relations with Africa, Asia, and the countries of the Southern Cone. Finally, the concept of global insertion, developed by the Institute of International Relations at the University of Brasília, has profoundly shaped the development of international studies in Brazil ever since.

These contributions made it possible to diversify research interests through 3 key variables—foreign policy, the establishment of the state's external objectives and strategies; diplomacy, understood as the negotiation of these objectives abroad; and the participation of dynamic agents of Brazilian society, that is, the domestic negotiation process (Cervo 2017, 13). While his analysis incorporated fruitful research on the revision of Brazil's international insertion strategies from a historical perspective, it ultimately reinforced the narrative of coherence and continuity in Brazilian foreign policy, framing development as its guiding vector.

In parallel, as Lima (2013, 145–147) analyzed, structuralists and realists alike addressed the interest in Brazil's peripheral situation and its reflexive condition in the Western hegemonic system. Despite their differences, these schools of thought converged in exploring the possibilities for peripheral countries to assert their autonomy, guided by their strategic priorities and ideological frameworks, in the face of structural determinants. These debates were instrumental in shaping foreign policy studies from the 1980s onward, and as a result, foreign policy analysis began to acquire its own identity as an independent epistemic space.

In addition to the study of the autonomy or dependence binomial, the observation of historical turning points in Brazilian foreign policy made it possible to highlight, as a guiding premise of this study, the possibilities for decision making despite the lack of power resources and economic dependence. The interpretations thus integrated the domestic determinants approach into systemic interpretations of international relations. As a result of these postulates, a critical current gradually emerged, departing from international relations studies more closely linked to research conducted in Rio de Janeiro, challenging the narrative of continuity in Brazilian foreign policy outlined by Itamaraty and incorporated into the research formulated at the University of Brasília.

5 | Harvest: Re-Democratization and Pluralization

Since the mid-1980s, a series of domestic, regional, and structural variables have encouraged the entry of an increasing number of actors and interests into Brazilian foreign policy. It gave rise to what Lopes (2020) defines as a "post-diplomatic" phase, that is, a moment of dissociation between policymakers and their traditional implementers, diplomats. With the gradual re-democratization of politics, the Brazilian state embarked on a process of modernization after two decades of rule by bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes. The consensus built around the 1988 Constitution institutionalized the principles of Brazilian foreign policy, adapting them to the priorities of the new context.

The economic liberalization that followed state reform involved a transition from a protectionist and industrialist development model to one based on the free market. It was accompanied by the entry into the Brazilian economy of numerous transnational actors—such as multinational corporations, international financial institutions, and foreign governments—, which intensified competition at the national level. In this context, foreign policy was reinforced as a means of integrating Brazil into the world economy, incorporating sectoral interests in the definition of external priorities (Lima 2000, 295). Regionally, cooperation between Argentina and Brazil increased, challenging the traditional view of the La Plata Basin as a competitive area. At the global level, the end of the Cold War, globalization, US pressure for policy harmonization, the strengthening of transnational economic forces, and the advance of information and communication technologies introduced numerous variables to be analyzed in the decision-making process.

This economic opening had a significant influence at the institutional level as diplomats were called upon to move to other government and private agencies in need of specialized support. This presence led to a greater awareness of the articulations and tensions between domestic and foreign policies, which in turn contributed to a greater interest in understanding international relations in companies, trade unions, and civil society organizations (Lopes et al. 2022). Besides these factors, the intensification of activism and the agency of civil society in the definition of international action was integrated through the blossoming of networks of transnational social movements such as the Porto Alegre World Social Forum (Milani and Pinheiro 2017, 280–281).

Within this framework, public policies evolved into more transversal and trans-scalar settings, interacting thematically and institutionally at local, regional, and global levels (Fernández and Abílio 2023). Moreover, as Oliveira and Pal (2018) argue, these processes of international transfer, diffusion, and circulation were driven by a broad range of actors, including policymakers, think tanks, private consultants, nonstate entities, and international organizations, all of whom played a role in shaping and contesting the direction of policy adaptation.

On another level, the reopening of once-confidential archives from the era of the military regime provided new avenues for academic research. Throughout the 1990s, international relations research experienced significant growth, fueled by

increasing government funding. This expansion led to studies on Brazil's international integration, foreign policy formulation, and key bilateral relations, especially with the United States and Argentina. Simultaneously, the traditional approach to understanding the international system incorporated emerging research on international political economy, international institutions and regimes, regional integration, and international security. These studies examined global transformation processes, exploring transnational mechanisms and the evolving role of the state amid challenges to sovereignty.

At an epistemic level, the incorporation of the contributions from the English School, as developed in the broader body of work of Celso Lafer, Gerson Fonseca Jr., and Andrew Hurrell, allowed the use of rationalist-Grocian assumptions to analyze the international political system and Brazilian foreign policy in historical perspective. Hand in hand with the process of redemocratization, the study of the perceptions, beliefs, and ideas that inspire decisionmakers also enriched foreign policy analysis. Likewise, constructivism gained ground in the country's academies as international relations were approached as a scenario in which different political discourses compete (Giacalone 2012, 338). These findings helped explain the changes that took place during the Collor de Mello administration, based on the adaptation of foreign policy to the norms and institutions of the international system (Herz 2002, 24–29).

Consequently, according to Lima (2013, 150–152), the study of international relations was divided into two main streams. On the one hand, there was an interest in the strong economic component of foreign policy, which led to the primacy of issues such as political economy and multilateralism. It was therefore essential to analyze the interest groups that shape Brazil's international position, as well as the domestic implementation of the commitments made. On the other hand, there was a growing influence on the field of foreign policy analysis, which began to include the study of the country's negotiating dynamics with a variety of new actors. As a result, research agendas moved toward theoretical frameworks that allowed for the interpretation of Brazilian actions and interventions in new areas. This proliferation of topics demonstrated the autonomy achieved by the discipline of international relations, as reflected in the creation of the Associação Brasileira de Relações Internacionais (ABRI) in 2005.

Moreover, the blurring of the boundary between the domestic and foreign spheres as an overlapping "intermestic continuum" (Hill 2003) challenged the ability of scholars to identify accurately the institutions and actors responsible for foreign policy decision making. To avoid this impasse, its interpretation as public policy gained weight by approaching it as the result of a negotiation process between a multiplicity of actors structured in a complex way through a polyarchic decision-making network (Salomón and Pinheiro 2013, 41). Milani and Pinheiro (2017, 282–292) argue that such a definition externalizes the very dynamics of politics, which since the 1988 Constitution has been based on the assumption of the exercise of democracy as a source of legitimacy. Thus, foreign policy depends on the decisions of governments and their nonlinear relations with different social actors and their interests, through coalitions, negotiations, disputes, and agreements.

In parallel with Milani (2021) observations, it is noteworthy that, while a significant portion of international relations scholarship continues to concentrate on Brazil's foreign policy and its interactions with neighboring countries, great powers, and international organizations, there has been a notable evolution in research agendas since the late 1990s. These transformations encompass the exploration of previously underresearched topics, including an analysis of the emerging foreign policy actors, a critical examination of the traditional focus on Itamaraty's bureaucratic insularity, and an advocacy for the development of novel theoretical frameworks. This paradigm shift not only emphasizes policy formulation but also prioritizes the advancement of sophisticated middle-range theories. Such theories aim to establish analytical categories that resonate with the experiences of other Southern powers (Lopes et al. 2022).

Thus, not only has the academic landscape transformed, but Itamaraty has also undergone a significant evolution. In the past 3 decades, it transitioned from an almost monopolistic and isolated producer of international affairs to an intragovernmental coordinator of Brazilian international action. This shift was driven by increasing domestic and international pressures for a more plural and participatory policymaking process, integrating a broader set of actors, including federal agencies, regional governments, market entities, and civil society (Faria 2012, 336).[7]

During the Cardoso and Lula administrations, the Ministry's loss of hegemony was accompanied by a process of noisy politicization and growing presidential interventionism (Lopes 2011). According to Lopes (2020, 4–6), their foreign ministers, Lafer and Amorim respectively, represented two positions that greatly stimulated the debate on Brazilian foreign policy. Thus, while the "Westernizers" defended the need for Brazil to adapt to international standards, the "de-Westernizing autonomists" advocated a revisionist stance (Mignolo 2011).[8] These shifts framed Brazil's growing global importance and gave way to a progressive interest on the part of the domestic and foreign media and academia, which actively intervened in the interpretation of its international actions, assuming sympathies and animosities (Almeida 2006).

In addition, many of the political debates in this context strongly influenced the dynamics of the Ministry. After the turn of the millennium, several measures were introduced to improve its representativeness, credibility, transparency, and plurality of voices. Following the Durban Conference against Racism in 2001, the Cardoso government signed the National Affirmative Action Program (Brazil. Presidency of the Republic 2002), which created the Scholarship-Prize for Diplomacy Vocation.[9] This premise was strengthened by the Lula government, which, in addition to the creation of the National Secretariat for the Promotion of Policies for Racial Equality (SNPIR) within the Ministry for Women, Family and Human Rights, established quotas for Afro-Brazilians in Itamaraty in 2010, ahead of Law No. 12.990 (Brazil. Presidency of the Republic 2014).[10]

Similarly, both Amorim's personal sensitivity and the directives of the Lula and Dilma administrations were key to the implementation of gender equality policies in the ministry, which

counted on a Gender and Race Management Committee since September 2014 (Friaça 2018). These advances were reinforced by the diversification of the recruitment base, driven by changes in the rules for career diplomats since 2005 and a significant influx of diplomats between 2006 and 2010. These combined factors contributed to the formation of a pluralistic mosaic of different sociological, geographical and professional backgrounds, in contrast to the traditional homogeneity of the bureaucratic body (Lopes and López Burian 2018, 116).

Moreover, the most successful initiatives to institutionalize dialog with civil society were conceived during Lula da Silva's term but took shape during Dilma Rousseff's administration. They included the institutionalization of a mechanism for consultation and social participation in the definition of foreign policy, as proposed by the National Council for International Relations. In short, it recommended the creation of the National Council for Brazilian Foreign Policy (CONPEB) to accompany the executive branch (and Itamaraty) in the formulation of general guidelines. In parallel, this initiative was supported by the organization of the National Conference 2003–2013: a new foreign policy, at the Federal University of ABC (UFABC), the Dialogues on Foreign Policy (Itamaray 2014), and the (failed) attempt to draft the first White Paper on Foreign Policy.

6 | Disengagement and Hyper-Ideologization

While policy initiatives to de-elitize Itamaraty and the Rio Branco Institute sought to challenge their historical isolation by integrating foreign policy into public discourse, these efforts faced several limitations. Key among these limitations was President Rousseff's limited interest in foreign policy and her prioritization of economic recovery, both of which limited substantive institutional reform. Resistance within the bureaucratic ranks created additional barriers that restricted the diversification of the diplomatic corps.

Concurrently, Brazil's economic downturn and rising social discontent fueled narratives that challenged the democratic rhetoric of foreign policy, portraying it as overly ideological and out of touch with Itamaraty's traditions and the "authentic values" of the Brazilian people. The waning support for Rousseff's administration from 2013, culminating in her impeachment in 2016, and the subsequent instability under President Temer (2016–2018), shifted the focus toward restoring Itamaraty's institutional autonomy. This shift crystallized into a strong opposition to the perceived "politicization" of foreign policy—a tendency rooted in Cardoso's presidency but increasingly pronounced after 2010.

Soon, this discourse was incorporated into the 2018 election campaign, and the growth of Bolsonaro's Americanist and anti-globalist preachments became unstoppable (Caballero and Crescentino 2020). Accordingly, the former military officer opened a rift in the dispute deployed by Lafer and Amorim between Westernizers and de-Westernizing autonomists. Bolsonaro's victory marked a new era for the orthodox Westernist faction in Itamaraty, shaping the country's re-Westernization as a counterpoint to the prior trend of de-Westernization (Fonseca 1998; Lopes 2020, 7).

Lopes (2020) explains that this approach emerged due to two factors. First, it was part of Brazil's strategy to build relations with Western powers in the context of the rise of Asia and the "reinitialization" of international relations. Second, it represented an alternative to democratizing foreign policy, previously monopolized by Itamaraty.

Prompted by a discourse that emphasized the need to return Itamaraty to the real "Brazilian people," Ernesto Araújo's appointment as head of the ministry was made possible by his closeness to presidential guru Olavo de Carvalho, his praise of Trumpism, and his criticism of his Itamaraty colleagues' alleged connivance with cultural Marxism. This worldview solidified the clear separation between decision making and the narratives of predictability and continuity in Brazil's international actions, as generated by both Itamaraty and academia.

At the organizational level, Araújo's new foreign policy adopted a stance that ran counter to the historical trajectory of Brazil's international action since the beginning of the New Republic in 1985. These objections stemmed from the belief that Itamaraty's traditional autonomy constituted a corporatist obstacle that Bolsonaro and Araújo sought to dismantle, creating a detachment between the institution and ordinary citizens. Consequently, policymakers had to endure an institutional reform process to align foreign policy with what they interpreted as the conservative, Western, and Christian character of Brazilian society (Maitino and Ruiz da Silveira Venerando 2023).

One of the new minister's first actions was to reform the institution by relaxing the diplomatic career requirements for heads of administrative departments and proposing the appointment of nondiplomatic advisors to the minister. These measures led to the departure of experienced officials and the promotion of lower-ranking staff loyal to Bolsonarism. The transformation also involved organizational changes to align the administrative structure with ideological Americanism. As part of this restructuring, the Secretariat for the Americas replaced the Undersecretariat for Latin America and the Caribbean, signaling a shift in regional priorities. This ideological reorientation extended to diplomatic training, as seen in the curriculum reform at the Rio Branco Institute, which reinforced classical education as a central pillar of Brazil's Western identity at the expense of regionalism and multilateralism.

The alleged ideological contamination of Itamaraty was thus employed to legitimize its replacement as the primary forum for the articulation and expression of foreign policy by the core group of ideological Bolsonarism, the self-proclaimed true interpreters of "the people." As a result, the loss of Itamaraty's role as the primary unifying force in Brazil's international affairs led to a fragmentation of foreign policy actors. Rather than advancing a unified agenda, these actors began to reflect shifting power dynamics and domestic political conflicts (Saraiva and Albuquerque 2022, 162). Lacking an integrative narrative or a singular voice, the government soon faced two pivotal events that damaged its international standing and strained relations with other nations—the Covid-19 health crisis and the election of Biden as President of the United States. Both situations exposed the government's weakened international position (Crescentino 2023).

In this context, Lula da Silva's third term unfolds in a complex political landscape that could hinder further democratization efforts within Itamaraty. Thus, while it is important to move beyond the outdated narrative of alleged continuity in Brazilian foreign policy, it is equally important to recognize that, contrary to this narrative, tensions are likely to persist. These tensions arise from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' commitment to upholding diplomatic tradition as a matter of state policy, in contrast with a vibrant civil society demanding a more transparent and accountable ministry.

This struggle was already evident in institutional protests against Bolsonarism, such as the proposal for a "reconstruction of Brazilian foreign policy" organized around Ricupero since April 2020, and the "renaissance program" for a "post-Bolsonaro foreign policy" published by the Instituto Diplomacia para Democracia in September 2020. It was also present in the criticism of the Foreign Affairs Working Group of the Lula government's interim cabinet, which was set up to discuss the administrative situation of Itamaraty and make a diagnosis of the country's foreign policy, and which had to be reformed to include civil society actors in its structure.

Moreover, although a large part of Itamaraty and academia viewed favorably the coalition formed around Lulismo, the internal strengthening of Bolsonarism in the ministry and the resurgence of ideological Americanism as an alternative among a significant part of the political elite may generate some resistance. All in all, it remains to be seen whether the effects of Bolsonaro's government on the definition of Brazil's international action will be long-lasting, or whether it will be interpreted retrospectively as a moment of rupture in the narrative of linear continuity of Brazilian foreign policy constructed by the ministry and academia.

7 | Concluding Remarks

One of the main findings of Pinheiro and Vedoveli's (2012) study highlights that any political project concerning Brazil's international actions must engage with the narrative of continuity that defines Itamaraty's tradition. Building on this insight, this article has explored key moments of association and dissociation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and academia in shaping the country's international actions and narratives from the mid-20th century to the present. While scholars have often reinforced narratives of continuity, in moments of dissociation, they have also played a crucial role in deconstructing them, introducing alternative historical perspectives and concepts and influencing shifts in foreign policy.

In recent decades, this dissociation has intensified due to the increasingly transversal, trans-scalar (Fernández and Abílio 2023), and internationalized (Oliveira and Pal 2018) nature of policymaking. As a result, Itamaraty, which was once the central locus of decision making, now acts as a coordinator in a broader negotiation process involving multiple actors. This shift has made Brazilian foreign policy more responsive to societal influences and political fluctuations, at the cost of long-term coherence and predictability (Lopes 2020).

A key moment in this transformation occurred during the Bolsonaro administration when Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo sought to reform the diplomatic corps by leveraging criticism of Itamaraty's detachment from popular sentiment. His efforts faced strong resistance from the political opposition, civil society, and even the diplomatic community. By 2020, internal dissent had given rise to initiatives to restore the Ministry's traditions and strengthen its ties with civil society. Thus, while Foreign Minister Antonio Francisco Azeredo da Silveira emphasized Itamaraty's capacity for renewal in 1974, it became evident that its true strength lies in its remarkable ability for self-preservation.

At the same time, academia has been at the forefront of efforts to democratize Brazil's foreign policymaking process since the late 20th century. This movement has aimed to challenge entrenched diplomatic narratives, promoting an anthropophagic perspective that blends Western and Global South traditions. Under Rousseff, universities and civil society organizations increasingly pressured the government for greater inclusion in foreign policy deliberations. This trend has continued under Lula's third period of government.

Ultimately, the study of Brazilian foreign policy must move beyond simplistic narratives of continuity and change. The relationship between Itamaraty and academia remains fluid, shaped by institutional traditions, intellectual debates, and political shifts. Understanding these dynamics is crucial not only to analyze Brazil's international positioning but also to have broader discussions about the role of knowledge production in foreign policymaking.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Endnotes

[1] The excessive overvaluation of facts and documents in the historical realm during the founding period of history as a discipline in the 19th century was influenced by the perspective of the historian Leopold von Ranke, who advocated objectivity and fidelity to authentic sources.

[2] This characteristic seems to have taken on a one-sided meaning since 1980, because while diplomats have maintained a certain inclination toward academic research topics, academics have moved away from the mere defence of the raison d'état. See Almeida (1998, 39).

[3] Claude Lévi-Strauss and Fernand Braudel, from the French delegation that founded the Universidade de São Paulo, were influenced by Brazilian ideas in their research.

[4] Moreover, the *Revista Brasileira de Politica Internacional*, founded in 1958, remains active and is one of the pioneering journals in its field. It maintains strong ties to Itamaraty and mirrors the evolution of a development-oriented mindset in policymaking. See Casarões (2018, 406).

[5] IUPERJ, founded in 1965 after ISEB's closure in 1964, aimed to bridge traditional and modern Brazilian political science by

combining the legacy of ISEB with North American social science's empirical approaches.

[6]Founded in 1978, CBRI aimed to gather academics and diplomats to shape international relations within universities. It differs from CEBRI, founded in 1998 as a Rio de Janeiro-based think tank, which seeks to improve Brazil's diplomacy and foreign policy by involving ambassadors, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs.

[7]As previously stated, until the 1980s Itamaraty strongly influenced the International Relations academy, shaped by realist intellectual convictions. See Fernández and Abílio (2023, 111).

[8]Pinheiro (2000) refers to the "Westernizers" as pragmatic institutionalists.

[9]It aimed to prepare black students for the Rio Branco Institute's civil service exams.

[10]This law reserved 20% of public examination places for black or mulatto candidates.

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