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Foreign policy redirection during a government transition: a statistical analysis of Brazil's military cooperation, 2015–2022

Reorientación de la política exterior durante la transición gubernamental: un análisis estadístico de la cooperación militar de Brasil entre 2015 y 2022

Abstract: This study assessed whether the government transition from 2015 to 2022, shifting from the progressive to the conservative end of the political spectrum, had an impact on military cooperation with the United States of America (USA) and with the countries of Brazil's strategic neighborhood, which include the neighboring South American nations and those along the West African coast. Data on international military cooperation were obtained from the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) and grouped by activity. The chi-square test was used to test for significant differences between the government periods, while Cramér's V measured the strength of the association, indicating an increase in activities with the United States at the expense of the other countries.

Keywords: Military cooperation; defense; foreign policy; international relations.

Resumen: Este artículo evaluó si la transición gubernamental durante el período comprendido entre 2015 y 2022, del espectro progresista al conservador, impactó la cooperación militar con Estados Unidos de América (EE. UU.) y con países del entorno estratégico de Brasil, que incluyen los países vecinos de América del Sur y los de la costa occidental de África. Los datos acerca de la cooperación militar internacional se obtuvieron de la Fuerza Aérea Brasileña (FAB) y se agruparon por actividad. Las pruebas de Chi-cuadrado y de Cramer verificaron, respectivamente, la hipótesis de una diferencia significativa entre los períodos de gobierno y la intensidad de este resultado, lo que indica un aumento de actividades en EE. UU., en detrimento de los demás países.

Palabras clave: Cooperación militar; Defensa, Política exterior; Relaciones internacionales.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Politically aligned governments tend to establish and expand partnerships across various areas. Between 2004 and 2013, under the leadership of the Workers' Party (PT – *Partido dos Trabalhadores*), the Brazilian government sought international prominence with policies aimed at regional integration in South America, with the goal of strengthening multilateralism and maintaining a pragmatic foreign policy, particularly with the consolidation of BRICS (Galinari, 2019; Rodrigues; Urdinez; Oliveira, 2019; Wajner; Wehner, 2023).

Beginning in 2019, following Bolsonaro's election as president and the formation of his cabinet—especially the appointment of Ambassador Ernesto Araújo as Minister of Foreign Affairs—Brazil experienced an institutional rapprochement with the United States, which resulted, among other developments, in the country being designated a major non-NATO ally and in the signing of a Technology Safeguards Agreement. Concurrently, Brazil distanced itself from countries within its strategic surroundings, including South American nations, countries along the western coast of Africa,[1] and Antarctica (Coelho; Treacy; Mello, 2023; Hirst; Valls Pereira, 2022; Wajner; Wehner, 2023). However, other authors have argued that Bolsonaro's foreign policy lost support following Joe Biden's election in the United States, increasing tensions over climate, human rights, and democracy, while not entirely abandoning its ideological discourse (Casarões; Farias, 2021; Jesus, 2022; Toni; Chaves, 2022). More recent studies have examined foreign policies pursued during these periods regarding Global South countries (Matos; Pietrafesa, 2024; Waisbich; Maglia, 2025), partnerships and China's influence (Bessimo; Neto, 2024; Borges; Martins; Nagual, 2024; Mesquita *et al*., 2024), environmental issues (Sawicka, 2024), and migration and human rights (Borges; Martins; Nagual, 2024; Dias; Ribeiro; França, 2024; Huland, 2024).

The pursuit of defense cooperation is supported by Brazil's National Defense Policy (PND – *Política Nacional de Defesa*) and National Defense Strategy (END – *Estratégia Naciional de Defesa*). Without disregarding the global sphere, the PND identifies Brazil's strategic environment as a priority area of interest, while also highlighting countries with historical ties and cultural affinities with Brazil, such as the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP – *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa*) (Brasil, 2025a). It should also be noted that PND refers to the significant increase in military defense spending and the intensification of strategic competition among countries, which may lead to spillover effects into regional environments, potentially affecting national interests. In this context, Brazil's participation in peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance operations (among other types of multinational operations), military exercises with other countries, and other defense-related activities contributes to not only the preparation of the Armed Forces but also to "strengthening cooperative ties and expanding the country's projection on the international stage" (Brasil, 2025a, our translation).

Defense cooperation promotes integration with countries in Brazil's strategic environment, partnerships with friendly countries, and the transfer of knowledge and technology, which can drive national growth, foster greater autonomy, and consequently reduce external dependence (Brasil, 2025a; Gonçalves; Ferreira, 2020; Oliveira; Souza, 2018). On the one hand, defense companies

1 Countries of interest along the western coast of Africa include: Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Cape Verde, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Namibia, and South Africa.

foster the country's technological advancement with research and innovation projects, strengthening strategic sectors and contributing to the development of other areas of the economy by means of skilled employment, investments in infrastructure, and regional economic growth (Cai *et al*., 2023; Rezende; Blackwell; Degaut, 2018). On the other hand, participation in international cooperation programs and the export of defense products increase national revenue and consolidate the country's position in the global market. Strategic partnerships established via international military cooperation, which bring together defense, industry, and research and development, ensure the modernization of Armed Forces equipment and the development of their human capital, while also facilitating the exchange of concepts, doctrines, guidelines, and procedures for the preparation and employment of military forces (Brasil, 2025a; Kenkel, 2011; Rodrigues; Urdinez; Oliveira, 2019).

Analyses of Brazilian foreign policy in the 2000s describe the United States as a relevant and hegemonic partner, but one operating in an increasingly multipolar environment (China, India, the European Union, among others), in which countries such as Brazil seek to diversify partnerships rather than accept a single axis oriented toward Washington (Pecequilo, 2008). Other authors argue that countries turn to the United States for military modernization, in response to common threats, and because of political affinities, within a global network of cooperation and through a process guided by strategic interests (Kinne, 2018). In educational and scientific cooperation, the U.S.–Brazil relationship has evolved into a strategic partnership due to the breadth of its programs and mutual interests, rather than because of any geopolitical "naturalness," according to Toscano (2014). Considering the premise that Brazil's presidential system is characterized by the president's prominent role in shaping the country's foreign policy (Brummer, 2024; Waisbich; Luiz; Faria, 2022), it would be reasonable to examine whether some form of ideological alignment could account for the increase or decrease in these programs.

The redirection of a country's foreign policy has attracted a growing number of academic research, underscoring the relevance of this study. Ideological differences between political parties have a discernible impact on decisions regarding security, trade, and foreign aid, while empirical research on foreign policy change remains relatively scarce (Haesebrouck; Joly, 2020; Hofmann, 2021; Raunio; Wagner, 2020). In Latin America, for example, evidence from 1980–2014 indicates that changes in presidential ideology resulted in an almost equivalent shift in foreign policy (Merke; Reynoso; Schenoni, 2020). Other authors have analyzed changes in foreign policy through the "bomb or build" dilemma (defense versus assistance), arguing that more militaristic governments shift funds from aid to defense (Wenzelburger; Böller, 2020). Brommesson and Ekengren (2013) examined the effects of changes in government in the United Kingdom in 1997 and 2010 and in Sweden in 1994 and 2006. Their analyses indicated that institutional design is an intervening variable influencing the ideological orientation of foreign policy. In the United Kingdom, a country characterized by a majoritarian institutional design, their foreign policy ideology underwent more significant changes during periods of government turnover than in Sweden, a country characterized by a consensus-based institutional design. The review by Haesebrouck and Joly (2020) mapped drivers of change (leadership, external shocks, and a focus on domestic politics) and reinforced the need for comparative studies of broad reorientations, such as transitions between ideologically opposed governments. Other studies on foreign aid have shown that "partisanship" has affected the volumes, composition, and sectorial allocation of support, although these effects were mediated by institutional and long-term factors (Greene; Licht, 2018; Thérien; Noël, 2000; Wenzelburger; Böller, 2020).

Military cooperation is an instrument of defense diplomacy with which a country conducts its foreign policy and can be implemented by means of a range of activities undertaken by the Armed Forces. This is evidenced in studies that define the role of defense diplomacy as the peaceful use of military resources to strengthen defensive ties and advance national foreign policy objectives (Maharjan, 2023; Muniruzzaman, 2020; Oelsner; Solmirano; Tasselkraut, 2024). Other authors describe defense cooperation as one of the most important instruments of contemporary states' foreign and security policies. Highlighting different forms of cooperation, the literature identifies the following activities: military education and training, instructional missions, and training teams (Drab, 2018, 2022); bilateral and multilateral exercises and maneuvers, including those aimed at testing interoperability and building confidence (Drab, 2018, 2022; Maharjan, 2023; Perković; Furlan, 2025); peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, overseas operations, disaster assistance, and participation in coalitions (Erforth, 2020; Maharjan, 2023; Oelsner; Solmirano; Tasselkraut, 2024; Perković; Furlan, 2025); cooperation and defense agreements, defense attachés, high-level visits, personnel exchanges, and training assignments in partner units (Baldino; Carr, 2016; Drab, 2018, 2022; Maharjan, 2023); and military assistance, equipment provision, and industrial cooperation, including modernization programs and associated training (Drab, 2018, 2022; Paudel, 2022).

Accessibility to ostensible data from the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) provided an opportunity to explore these forms of cooperation identified in the literature as variables in the study[2]. Within the Aeronautics Command, the 2nd Deputy Chief of Staff is responsible for managing FAB's international relations. In general terms, the Air Force International Military Cooperation Section seeks to promote integration activities with Latin American countries, particularly Brazil's neighbors, as well as technological and doctrinal rapprochement with the United States and selected European countries. To facilitate the coordination of activities, the geographic regions are grouped as follows: Central America and South America; North America and Africa; and Eurasia and Oceania. An additional group comprises educational cooperation activities, monitored through the exchange of military personnel participating in courses of interest (Brasil, 2025b).

Thus, this study aims to assess whether military cooperation with the United States differed statistically from that with countries in Brazil's strategic environment during the transition from a progressive to a conservative government. In this context, the study asks whether the hypothesis tests reject or fail to reject the trend toward realignment with the United States. Data were collected for 2015–2022, comprising the four years preceding Jair Bolsonaro's administration; 2015–2018; and his four-year term, 2019–2022. Equal time periods were used to ensure a balanced comparison.

2 INTERNATIONAL MILITARY COOPERATION

The definition of international military cooperation is broad and diverse, and may encompass various activities. Collaboration and technology transfer in the defense industry

2 Ostensible data obtained by the authors for academic purposes from the International Military Cooperation Section and the Overflight Section of the 2nd Deputy Chief of Staff of the Air Force, in October 2023.

are crucial in enhancing military capabilities, reducing dependence on imports, and strengthening national and global security. Through international cooperation, countries can share advanced technology, technical knowledge, and development costs, which not only increases efficiency but also drives innovation in the defense sector (Ariputro *et al*., 2024). According to Goldoni and Neto (2014), military cooperation may include the purchase, sale, lease, or even donation of military equipment; military training and education; the sharing of military technologies and doctrines; partnerships in strategic projects; military alliances; information sharing; authorization for the establishment of military bases; and provision of humanitarian assistance.

Rezende (2015) argues that military cooperation is essential for conflict prevention, since it can facilitate confidence-building between countries that are adversaries—or potential adversaries—and help deepen relations between allied countries. However, the author explains that this dynamic is ineffective when there are considerable political differences between the countries involved. The author identifies several factors contributing to the success of military cooperation: compatibility of domestic political values; a long-term perspective that accounts for changes among actors over time; domestic support; and the use of multilateral instruments for legitimation. Along similar lines, Athirah (2025) drew on more than 70 years of relations between Indonesia and Turkey, highlighting that bilateral cooperation experienced significant growth following the 2010 defense agreement. Cooperation between the two countries exemplifies a progressive approach to defense diplomacy, integrating strategic cooperation with industrial innovations. Grounded in shared geopolitical interests, this cooperation led to significant advancements, including the development of new armored and unmanned aerial vehicles, representing critical milestones in Indonesia's defense modernization and industrial self-sufficiency.

Harutyunyan and Davtyan (2019) proposed three basic motivations for military cooperation among countries: economic, operational, and political. The economic motivation focuses on the more efficient allocation of budgets allocated to investments in military research and the development of military products. Other authors have also addressed this motivation, identifying cost-sharing, economies of scale, the development of the defense industry, and technological innovation via cooperation and technology transfer as key drivers (Ariputro *et al*., 2024; Athirah, 2025; Kinne; Peinhardt, 2024). The economic benefits were also highlighted by Ariputro *et al*. (2024), who mentioned job creation, the development of local industry, and increased investment in research and development. However, the authors also emphasized challenges such as divergent national interests, technical coordination, and intellectual property protection, which must be addressed to ensure the success of collaborative projects.

The operational motivation identified by Harutyunyan and Davtyan (2019) focuses on promoting interoperability and standardization among the Armed Forces involved by means of multinational exercises, complementary functions within military staffs, and division of labor within alliances (Gannon, 2025; Grgić; Wilkins, 2025). The political motivation is reflected in the consolidation and strengthening of alliances with other countries. According to the authors, cooperation in the defense industry is accompanied by intensified military technological exchanges, resulting in one critical problem: increased interdependence among cooperating countries. Other authors have

further developed this topic, focusing on the consolidation of alliances, networks of defense cooperation treaties, and alignment with strategic rivals, such as the United States and India, China and Russia, among others (Ji; Wu, 2025; Lou, 2024; Robinson, 2025; Tsebenko *et al*., 2024). Others, however, have highlighted the ambivalent role of alliances, which can provide security but also exacerbate conflicts and hinder regional cooperation, as illustrated by the NATO–Russia relations and the U.S. alliances in Asia, as well as by political, legal, and financial challenges facing modern alliances in the Euro-Atlantic region, such as NATO, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) (Tsebenko *et al*., 2024; Zou, 2024).

According to Kinne and Peinhardt (2024), the potential for mutual influence or "spillover" between economic and security cooperation has long been of interest to both policymakers and scholars. The authors argue that existing theoretical and empirical approaches to economic–security spillover focus on bilateral-level influences. In the case of bilateral investment treaties, governments pursue a network hierarchy strategy that allows them to influence treaty design and protect their companies. In defense cooperation agreements, by contrast, states prioritize a network community strategy focused on gathering collective security assets among groups of collaborators with common interests. The authors highlight that when these network strategies complement each other, they promote cooperative spillover between economy and security domains; when they conflict, however, they inhibit the dissemination of benefits, such that partnership in one domain—economic or security—discourages cooperation in the other.

Keohane (2018) examines the European Union in the context of international military cooperation, highlighting difficulties involved in reconciling interests in this field. The author explains that France, for example, places greater emphasis in effective policies within each particular framework and is willing to undertake military interventions at a global level, while Germany is more focused on developing military cooperation processes and is inclined to participate only in coalitions, adopting a more reactive approach. Meanwhile, Italy and Poland are supportive of European military cooperation: Italy seeks to stabilize ongoing conflicts in countries to the south, and Poland seeks to maintain a line of defense against Russia in Eastern Europe.

Araújo (2008) corroborates the arguments put forward by Harutyunyan and Davtyan (2019) and Keohane (2018) by analyzing the Brazilian Army's rapprochement with and subsequent distancing from military cooperation with France. According to the author, much of military cooperation is linked to the trade in arms and military equipment, as well as to the political and strategic interests of nations. As an example, he cites the rapprochement between the United States and Brazil during World War II, driven by U.S. concerns about the growing influence of Nazi Germany in South America, particularly in Argentina and Brazil. From the Brazilian perspective, the main reason for this rapprochement was the interest in establishing the National Siderurgy Company (CSN – *Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional*), which led to the deterioration of the country's longstanding military relations with France.

Muthanna (2006) underscores the role of military cooperation in fostering an environment of regional peace and stability, contributing to the maintenance of the Armed Forces while ensuring the efficient allocation of expenditures. The author emphasizes that cooperation activities must not undermine the country's defense capabilities and identifies five factors that should be considered: ensuring and enhancing external and internal security; increasing the country's own defense and military capabilities; avoiding any adverse effects on national interests and the

capacity for independent military action; maintaining a balance between resources required and alliances established; and, finally, ensuring compatibility with the country's other commitments (alliances, treaties, among others).

3 CONTEXTUALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT PERIODS

Military cooperation is directly affected by the context of international relations among states, making it necessary to assess the political context of each period (Milani, 2021; Rezende, 2015; Vidigal; Bernal-Meza, 2020). Thus, Brazil's governmental transition between 2015 and 2021 encompassed two distinct periods[3].

3.1 Period from 2015 to 2018

This period was governed by Dilma Rousseff until August 2016 and by her vice president, Michel Temer, until January 2019. Silva (2019) drew on Charles Hermann's theory[4] to evaluate changes in foreign policy during the transition between these governments. The author highlights President Temer's importance in the foreign policy change process, mainly because he was responsible for appointing the foreign minister who would coordinate efforts in this area. Silva (2019) further explains that the decline in commodity prices, decreasing exports to China, Donald Trump's election in the United States, the election of center-right leaders in South America, and Brexit were the main external factors contributing to the international instability that favored President Dilma's impeachment and the subsequent change in Brazilian foreign policy.

According to Galinari (2019, p. 195), the PT era was marked by a combination of ideological principles and policies that had already been pursued since the country's redemocratization, making this leftward shift in foreign policy more gradual. The author identified five main features that stood out in foreign policy during this period: the pursuit of a prominent role in international affairs; efforts to establish leadership in the Global South; leadership in the process of regional integration in South America; efforts to strengthen multilateralism, particularly with the consolidation of BRICS; and maintenance of a pragmatic foreign policy despite the presence of a left-wing ideology.

3 An additional explanation is warranted regarding the division of periods adopted in this study, despite the absence of clear-cut boundaries between the ideologies characterizing these periods, as noted by Vidigal (2019). For methodological purposes, the analysis was divided into two four-year periods (2015–2018 and 2019–2022), ensuring temporal balance and statistical comparability between intervals. Although the first period included the transition between the governments of Dilma Rousseff and Michel Temer, the authors assume that this approach allows us to examine the effects of political instability and the gradual reorientation of foreign policy in an integrated manner, without fragmenting the historical series into unequal intervals. Furthermore, given that empirical research does not always provide access to all ideal data, the authors sought the best way to ensure the homogeneity of the periods, thereby reducing bias and strengthening the robustness of the statistical tests (chi-square and Cramér's V). This methodological limitation is also addressed in the final section of this study. Thus, the comparison is not restricted to specific governments but rather considers equivalent time blocks, lending validity to the results and enabling structural differences between periods characterized by progressive and conservative orientations to be identified.

4 According to Charles Hermann, there are four sources of change in a country's foreign policy: the leader and their political power; the bureaucracy and its institutional orientation; domestic restructuring, involving segments of society that drive change; and, finally, external shocks capable of affecting the domestic political environment.

Miranda (2019) documents the decline of this approach during Dilma Rousseff's second administration. According to the author, the increased presence of China in South America, together with domestic factors, led to a reduction in presidential visits to neighboring countries and a consequent decline in Brazil's regional leadership. For Barros and Gonçalves (2019), Brazil's regional leadership began to decline in 2013, with passivity and relative disengagement observed in 2015 and 2016.

According to Silva (2019), breaking with the PT era, the Temer administration appointed José Serra and, subsequently, Aloysio Nunes, both senators from the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), as Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which resulted in a change in the direction of Brazilian foreign policy. The author repeatedly uses the expression "de-ideologization[5] of foreign policy," an interpretation supported by Saraiva (2020) but challenged by Galinari (2019), who argues that there was no break with left-wing ideology, but rather a shift to the right. In his study, the author argues that PT's ideological principles were combined with policies already underway since the country's redemocratization, making the transition relatively smooth. Therefore, rather than a rupture, there was a gradual shift in orientation, marked by greater pragmatism and the adoption of more conservative positions in foreign policy, particularly after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and Jair Bolsonaro's rise to power.

Silva (2019, p. 34, our translation) finds that "Temer's actions sought domestic support, backed by an external legitimizing force based on the idea of a government that was politically and economically responsible, thereby legitimizing the impeachment process." The author concludes by clarifying that, among Charles Hermann's four sources of change (leadership, bureaucracy, domestic restructuring, and external shocks), only the latter two actually contributed to changes in foreign policy. The bureaucracy, represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, acted in the opposite direction, adopting a resistant stance, while the lack of leadership further hindered support for the ideas and initiatives of Brazilian diplomacy. This resulted in "a state of deadlock and waiting amid an unstable international environment and the proximity of the 2018 elections" (Silva, 2019, p. 35, our translation).

Miranda (2019, p. 131) adds that the Union of South American Nations (USAN)'s failure to recognize the impeachment process contributed to Brazil's declining interest in the region. The author also cites Brazil's opposition to the situation in Venezuela and its subsequent suspension from the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), a development that further confirmed the weakening of regional integration initiatives under Brazilian leadership. This "power vacuum," left by the Brazilian government during this period, encouraged the emergence of fragmented initiatives among neighboring countries, most notably the creation of the Lima Group[6] and the establishment of the Forum for the Progress and Integration of South America (PROSUL) (Barros; Gonçalves, 2019).

Moreira (2020) also highlights the prioritization of trade-related issues, particularly attracting investment and negotiating trade agreements, as well as the renewed focus on "border security" as key features of Brazilian foreign policy under the Temer administration.

5 In the cited passage, the term "de-ideologization" refers to an attempt to remove an explicit ideological orientation from Brazilian foreign policy, such as the progressive orientation associated with PT governments. In other words, it refers to conducting diplomacy in a more pragmatic manner, prioritizing economic objectives and international legitimacy over agendas tied to a specific ideology (Saraiva, 2020; Silva, 2019).

6 The Lima Group was established on August 8, 2017, with the aim of seeking a solution to the Venezuelan crisis. It was not an international organization, but rather an *ad hoc* mechanism. Twelve countries participated in the initial meeting and signed the Lima Declaration: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Canada, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru. Other countries were subsequently included in the declarations as they participated in the meetings (Barros; Gonçalves, 2019, p. 15).

3.2 Period from 2019 to 2022

During the transition period from the Temer administration to the Bolsonaro administration, Van Klaveren (2020) analyzed Latin America and identified an exacerbated and growing nationalism in the region, which led to a rejection of the delegation of sovereignty and international institutionalism, weakening the region's commitment to multilateral cooperation. Beyond Latin America, the author observed that this distancing had begun in the United States, which had previously based its foreign policy and cooperation on the defense of human rights and the promotion of democracy. This was also observed in the United Kingdom, once at the forefront of globalization.

Van Klaveren (2020) emphasized that Latin America has long been at the forefront of multilateral cooperation, particularly in the areas of human rights, international criminal law, the prohibition of the use of force, the law of the sea, the Antarctic Treaty System, international trade, the environment, and prohibition of nuclear weapons, representing an essential feature of the region's integration into the international system. The author highlights that the multilateralism crisis reflects an erosion of regional institutions of cooperation, reinforcing the growing degree of distrust in these institutions, which is amplified or mitigated depending on the government in power.

With Jair Bolsonaro's rise to power, Brazilian foreign policy underwent a sharp shift to the right, marking a break with the previous government's objectives. Galinari (2019, p. 208) argues that Brazil's new foreign policy adopted a stance aligned with and subordinate to U.S. interests. This became evident in the government's handling of issues such as the Venezuelan crisis, migration, the Arab–Israeli conflict, and Brazil's actions in the UN Human Rights Council. This subordination brought the Trump and Bolsonaro administrations closer together to an extent not seen in decades. Galinari (2019) also highlighted other initiatives undertaken by the Bolsonaro administration: distancing itself from former allies associated with the political left; moving closer to countries governed by right-wing or far-right groups; reassessing the importance previously assigned to multilateralism and regional integration; and sharply changing Brazil's position on the Arab–Israeli issue.

Guimarães *et al*. (2023) add that, alongside Bolsonaro, five political currents also rose to power: ideological, evangelical, agribusiness, military, and neoliberal currents. The first group comprised followers of Olavo de Carvalho[7], who advocated ultraconservative foreign policy ideals. The evangelical wing, in turn, focused on strengthening relations with Israel. The agribusiness sector sought to relax environmental protection policies while promoting stable international trade, particularly with China. The military current favored strong nationalism, focusing on sovereignty, especially regarding the Amazon. Finally, the neoliberal current sought Brazil's accession

7 Olavo de Carvalho (1947–2022) was a Brazilian writer and polemicist, known for his work as a self-taught philosopher and for his role as an ideologue of Brazil's new right. Based in the United States from the 2000s onward, he became an influential figure among ultraconservative sectors, particularly via online courses and publications in which he advocated anti-communist positions and criticized globalism. His influence was instrumental in shaping the ideological group that rose to prominence with Jair Bolsonaro, since many of his followers held strategic positions in the government and promoted his foreign policy views, characterized by alignment with the United States and rejection of multilateralism (Casarões; Farias, 2021; Zambello; Silva; Di Carlo, 2021).

to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as the implementation of market-oriented reforms.

Galinari (2019) and Vidigal and Bernal-Meza (2020) identified the main actions undertaken by the Bolsonaro administration that shaped its foreign policy: opposition to multilateralism; distancing from countries associated with PT (Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, etc.) and a return to traditional partnerships (the United States and Western Europe); Brazil's withdrawal from UNASUL and entry into PROSUL; alignment with the United States (support for immigration restrictions, purchases of U.S. wheat, and establishment of a business office in Jerusalem); treating Mercosur as a secondary issue; and reducing the importance assigned to Argentina while shifting the focus to Chile.

Moreira (2020) states that the Bolsonaro administration's Brazilian foreign policy was characterized by a departure from established diplomatic practices and framed by the discourse of "de-ideologization," with a focus on the economy and border security. The author also highlighted President Bolsonaro's message to the National Congress, which outlined the main areas of his government's foreign policy: strategic affairs; bilateral and multilateral diplomacy; regional integration; foreign trade and economic diplomacy; Brazilian communities abroad and migration flows; international cooperation; and security, defense, and intelligence.

Vidigal (2019) and Lima and Albuquerque (2022), in contrast, argue that the main characteristic of the Bolsonaro administration's foreign policy was Brazil's "subordinate" alignment with the U.S. government and its foreign policy, stating that "it can be inferred that a prior understanding was reached between Trump and Bolsonaro through advisers and family members, making Brazilian foreign policy a forced mirror of U.S. foreign policy" (Vidigal, 2019, p. 5, our translation).

According to Vidigal (2019), there was continuity between the Temer and Bolsonaro administrations, with the latter characterized by an "uncritical" and non-reciprocal alignment with the United States with the adoption of U.S. foreign policy positions, including the trade and technological war with China, engagement with Taiwan, alignment with Israel, and opposition to the Maduro government in Venezuela (p. 15). For Vidigal and Bernal-Meza (2020), Bolsonaro altered the initial course of his foreign policy in response to the crisis in Venezuela and the interests of the agribusiness sector in the Chinese market. They added that China's entry into the political economy of South America had displaced Brazil from its position within Mercosur, weakening Brazilian regional leadership.

4 STATISTICAL MODEL

For the analysis of data obtained in this study, we adopted the methodological framework proposed by political scientists Kellstedt and Whitten (2018)[8]. They argue that a causal theory in

8 The book *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research* (Kellstedt and Whitten, 2018) is used in political science methodology courses at leading universities in the United States and Europe, particularly in undergraduate and graduate programs that emphasize quantitative methods, and is considered a major reference for introductory research design and causal analysis. Institutions reported to use the book include Harvard University, the University of Michigan, the University of California, Berkeley, Texas A&M University, the London School of Economics, the University of Oxford, the University of Essex, and Sciences Po Paris. Due to its international recognition, pedagogical clarity, and integration of theory and methods, demonstrating how causal hypotheses should be supported by theoretical logic before being statistically tested, the book is used in the Research Methodology course at the Escola Superior de Guerra (ESG) and served as the theoretical framework for this study.

political science cannot rely exclusively on statistical tests. They emphasize that there are four ways to assess a causal relationship: three conceptual and only one statistical. Conceptual assessments involve evaluating the clarity of the theory, the logical plausibility of the causal mechanism, and the preliminary empirical consistency with the observed phenomenon. The statistical test, in turn, is an additional tool that allows researchers to determine whether the data reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between cause and effect.

In this sense, hypothesis testing should not be understood as a "definitive proof" of the theory, but rather as a tool that assists in assessing its validity. It does not confirm the theory; it only indicates whether the available data are consistent with the expected causal relationship. Rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that there is statistical evidence of an association between the variables in the causal theory, but it does not eliminate the need for theoretical and conceptual support. Likewise, failure to reject the null hypothesis does not invalidate the theory, as it may reflect limitations in the data, measurement, or research design (Kellstedt; Whitten, 2018).

Thus, in this research, the chi-square and Cramér's are used as part of a broader process of causal assessment. They allow us to verify whether there are significant differences between the periods analyzed, but their interpretation depends on their integration with the theoretical foundations of foreign policy and defense diplomacy. In other words, the statistical test is an important but not self-sufficient component: it should be interpreted in conjunction with the theory and the selected indicators, while recognizing both its potential and its limitations (Kellstedt; Whitten, 2018).

Several studies show that alignment with the United States became a structuring axis of Bolsonaro's foreign policy, with personal and ideological ties to Donald Trump, including in the defense and security agenda (Hirst; Valls Pereira, 2022; Jesus, 2022; Vidigal; Bernal-Meza, 2020). This alignment has been described as an "automatic alignment" with the United States and other ideologically aligned regimes, breaking with Brazil's tradition of autonomy (Vidigal, 2019). Other analyses have also highlighted the role of transnational far-right networks and the Bolsonaro family in forging ties with conservative international allies (Casarões; Belém-Lopes, 2025; Casarões; Farias, 2021).

This dynamic gave rise to a causal theory linking increased interactions with the United States to a possible reduction in defense cooperation events with countries in Brazil's strategic environment. Before being subjected to quantitative assessment, this theory underwent the conceptual tests proposed by Kellstedt and Whitten (2018): theoretical clarity, logical plausibility, and preliminary empirical consistency. Only after this stage were the data used to conduct the hypothesis tests, which neither confirm nor prove the theory but indicate whether the observed differences in the indicators lead to rejection or failure to reject the null hypothesis. The quantitative stage of causal theory analysis strengthens the study, as empirical indicators are valuable in supporting arguments in political science by providing additional evidence that reinforces or challenges the proposed causal relationship.

For the hypothesis tests, data provided by the Brazilian Air Force Command were used, covering the period from 2015 to 2022. The 2015–2018 period was designated "Government 1," while the 2019–2022 period was designated "Government 2," in accordance with the constraints

of the database consulted and the methodological considerations regarding the temporal homogeneity of the periods.

The selected indicators were used as empirical variables to test the hypothesis of foreign policy realignment. The underlying logic is that if these activities increasingly concentrate on the United States at the expense of countries in Brazil's strategic environment, it is reasonable to consider the hypothesis of conservative alignment with the U.S. axis; otherwise, the hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the indicators translate the political orientation of the governments under analysis into observable data, allowing the statistical tests to assess significant differences between the periods.

Data on international military cooperation were collected and grouped into the following categories: courses, placements, and conferences; exchanges; operations and exercises; and meetings and visits/other activities. The information covered activities conducted both in Brazil and abroad, distinguishing between those that were planned and those that were actually executed. Each group was counted based on the missions or activities themselves, rather than on the number of countries or military units participating in each activity. Thus, for example, 10 units allocated to courses represent 10 courses conducted, regardless of the number of actors involved in each one.

Information was also collected on official flights conducted by friendly countries, including the respective aircraft that landed in Brazil during the two periods. This variable was measured by the presence of a foreign military aircraft in Brazilian territory and its subsequent return to its country of origin, regardless of the number of passengers on board or the length of stay. At the request of the Brazilian Air Force Command, the raw data have been omitted from this article.

The hypothesis tests were performed using the chi-square test ($\chi 2$), which evaluates statistical significance by comparing the observed and expected frequencies in the data, and Cramér's (C_V), which was used to assess the strength of the association. For example, the chi-square test may indicate the existence of an association between variables; however, the association may be too weak to be relevant for the analysis or decision-making process.

The use of the chi-square test for hypothesis testing in foreign policy research is common in the political science literature. Bryan and Tama (2024), for example, investigated the polarization of elected U.S. candidates in foreign policy debates concerning international and domestic issues. Along similar lines, Wang *et al*. (2023) used this procedure to assess the effects of diplomatic visits by officials from major powers to developing countries. Rosendorf (2023) analyzed the impact of national interests on international cooperation through formal alliances and strategic partnerships. Other studies have addressed global issues, such as Bunyavejchewin and Sirichuanjun (2021), who investigated the influence of political regime type on responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and whether the quality of governance affected these measures at the national level, and McLean and Whang (2014), who analyzed the formulation of foreign policy involving economic sanctions as a means of extracting concessions, identifying a tendency to apply retaliatory measures that were less harmful to interest groups. Furthermore, the methodological approach proposed here is also supported by studies such as those by Brown *et al.* (2023), Gibson, Stillman, and Le (2008), and Smith (2000), in which the authors also applied Cramér's (C_V) as a complement to nonparametric analysis.

Equation (1) presents the calculation formula, in which ∑ denotes the summation, "O" represents the observed frequencies, and "E" represents the expected frequencies.

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \quad (1)$$

The result of Equation (1) indicates that the test statistic increases as the difference between the observed and expected data increases. This result is compared with a critical value corresponding to the previously defined significance level. If the calculated value is greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a statistically significant association between the two variables. Otherwise, the relationship lacks statistical support.

To determine the critical value, the degrees of freedom (df) are first calculated according to Equation (2), considering "r" rows and "c" columns in the contingency table:

$$gl = (r-1) \cdot (c-1) \quad (2)$$

Decision-making in the chi-square test depends on comparing the alpha level—established based on the selected significance level—with the p-value resulting from the analysis. In general, an alpha level of 0.05 is adopted, corresponding to a 95% confidence level. Whenever the p-value is less than alpha, the initial (or null) hypothesis is rejected, providing evidence in favor of the alternative hypothesis. If the p-value is greater than the alpha level, the null hypothesis is not rejected because there is insufficient evidence to support the alternative hypothesis (Kellstedt; Whitten, 2018).

The test statistic for Cramér's (CV) is calculated according to Equation (3), in which "χ^2" is the value obtained from the chi-square, "n" represents of observations (frequencies) collected, and "min" indicates the smaller of the number of rows minus one (r-1) or the number of columns minus one (c-1) in the table (McHugh, 2013).

$$C_v = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{n\,(\min{(c-1),(r-1)})}} \quad (3)$$

According to Dai *et al.* (2021), the results can be grouped into the following classes:

- C_v value > 0.05 – weak relationship between variables;
- C_v value > 0.10 – moderate relationship between variables;
- C_v value > 0.15 – strong relationship between variables; and
- C_v value > 0.25 – very strong relationship between variables.

5 RESULT ANALYSIS

The analysis of the results was based on the data collected, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1 – Data collected

International Military Cooperation Actions	USA		Strategic Surroundings	
	Gov1	Gov2	Gov1	Gov2
Total planned cooperations	287	152	926	632
Total cooperations executed	200	157	603	275
Cancellation rate (total cooperations)	30%	−3%	35%	56%
Frequency of flights	372	361	627	421
Reduction of flights in relation to Government 1	xxx	3%	xxx	33%
Planned courses, placements, and conferences	91	90	427	493
Executed courses, placements, and conferences	61	75	224	148
Cancellation rate (courses, placements, and conferences)	33%	17%	48%	70%
Planned exchanges	44	42	136	64
Exchanges conducted	22	31	69	35
Cancellation rate (exchanges)	50%	26%	49%	45%
Planned operations and maneuvers	14	9	21	18
Executed operations and maneuvers	10	10	20	6
Cancellation rate (operations and maneuvers)	29%	−11%	5%	67%
Planned meetings	40	6	104	16
Executed meetings	39	11	103	24
Cancellation rate (meetings)	3%	−83%	1%	−50%
Visits and other planned events	98	5	238	41
Executed visits and other events	68	30	187	62
Cancellation rate (visits and other events)	31%	−500%	21%	−51%

Source: Brasil (2025c).

Results of the chi-square and Cramér's tests are shown in Table 2:

Table 2 – Relevant statistical results

FAB International Military Cooperation					
Cooperation item	**X^2 test**	**p-value (0.05)**	**Did the change of government change the orientation?**	**Cramér's test**	**Strength of the relationship between variables**
All activities executed	17.323	3.153e-05	Yes	0.1203	Moderate/ Strong
Frequency of flights	14.066	0.0001765	Yes	0.09002	Moderate
Executed courses, placements, and conferences	8.9297	0.002806	Yes	0.1599	Strong
Planned exchanges	6.605	0.01017	Yes	0.1599	Strong
Exchanges conducted	7.8981	0.004949	Yes	0.2379	Very strong
Executed operations and maneuvers	2.5228	0.1122	No (p-value > 0.05)	0.2802	Very strong
Executed meetings	0.066024	0.7972	No (p-value > 0.05)	0.03507	Very weak
Planned visits and other events	5.9806	0.01446	Yes	0.1342	Moderate/ Strong

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Negative cancellation rates, indicated in the shaded cells, represent more activities being executed than planned. This increase in international military cooperation activities—specifically in the total number of activities and in operations/exercises, meetings, visits, and other events—occurred only during the Bolsonaro administration. Regarding the total number of cooperation activities, Table 1 also shows an increase in events involving the United States (−3%) and a greater reduction among countries in Brazil's strategic environment (56%). Table 2 shows that the activities conducted with the United States differed significantly from those conducted with countries in Brazil's strategic environment. Thus, the government transition affected the direction of FAB military cooperation, with moderate-to-strong intensity.

Regarding flight frequency, while the reduction in this activity involving the United States during the Bolsonaro administration was 3%, the reduction involving countries in Brazil's strategic environment was more than ten times higher (33%) during the same administration (Table 1). This reduction was statistically significant, indicating that the government transition changed this military cooperation activity with moderate intensity, as indicated in Table 2.

Regarding courses, placements, and conferences conducted, the impact of the new orientation toward the United States was also evident, since activities involving the United States decreased by 17%, whereas those involving countries in Brazil's strategic environment decreased by 70% (Table 1). From a statistical perspective, the hypothesis test supported this trend with a strong effect (Table 2). Exchange activities followed a similar pattern, showing a greater reduction among countries in Brazil's strategic environment (45%), according to the results of the hypothesis tests, which indicated strong to very strong effects (Table 2).

Operations and exercises conducted with the U.S. government increased by 11% during the Bolsonaro administration, while those involving countries in Brazil's strategic environment decreased by 67% (Table 1). However, the hypothesis tests did not indicate a significant difference compared with the PT administration (Table 2), meaning that this variable alone does not provide sufficient support for the argument of a strategic reorientation toward the United States. A similar pattern was observed for meetings (Table 1), as the statistical tests did not identify a significant difference between the administrations, indicating a very weak effect (Table 2). However, when Cramér's is considered alongside the substantial increase in meetings with Washington (83%), this variable can reasonably be regarded as supporting the argument that the transition between governments led to a strategic reorientation, characterized by the distancing from countries in Brazil's strategic environment and closer ties with the United States.

Finally, visits and other military cooperation events showed a 500% increase in activities involving the United States during the Bolsonaro administration, a result corroborated by the hypothesis tests, which indicated a moderate-to-strong effect.

Taken together, these results provide sufficient evidence to conclude that the transition between governments led to a strategic–military realignment with the United States, as identified through FAB data. This also highlights the president's ability to shape the process of foreign policy change. The Lula and Dilma period was marked by multilateralism, whereas the subsequent period was characterized by bilateralism, prioritizing the United States over other countries.

6 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess whether military cooperation with the United States differed statistically from that with countries in Brazil's strategic environment during the transition from a progressive-leaning government to a conservative-leaning one. The PND emphasizes cooperation and integration with South American countries and those in Brazil's strategic environment, promoting the exchanges necessary to develop well-prepared and well-equipped Armed Forces.

Data were collected on FAB exchange activities between 2015 and 2022, including courses, placements, conferences, exchanges, military operations and exercises, high-level meetings, visits, and overflights and landings by foreign aircraft in Brazil. These data were grouped and statistically analyzed using the chi-square test and Cramér's . A change in the strategic orientation of FAB's international cooperation was identified in most of the activities examined.

This redirection was consistent with the new administration's approach, confirming the president's leading role in shaping foreign policy. However, the Federal Constitution, the PND, and the END clearly prioritize regional integration, with particular emphasis on Brazil's strategic environment. These documents also emphasize the pursuit of exchanges with nations of greater strategic interest, particularly from a technological perspective. The study revealed that courses, placements, conferences, and exchange activities prioritized the United States at the expense of Brazil's regional strategic environment.

Another important point to note is the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2023. As a result of mobility restrictions imposed worldwide, the data for this period were naturally constrained. Nevertheless, several military cooperation activities increased, making it reasonable to assume that the differences in favor of the United States would have been even greater under normal circumstances.

Although dividing the periods into equal intervals ensured statistical balance in the analysis, it is acknowledged that the ideological boundaries between 2015–2018 and 2019–2022 are not entirely clear-cut, as pointed out by Vidigal (2019). This overlap requires caution when interpreting the results, which should be understood as structural trends in Brazilian foreign policy rather than absolute breaks. This is consistent with the arguments of Galinari (2019). It is also important to recognize that the results reflect only the dimension of military cooperation recorded by FAB and do not encompass Brazilian foreign policy as a whole. Moreover, factors beyond domestic control and the very nature of the statistical tests—which indicate association but not definitive causality—require caution when interpreting the findings. Thus, the results should be understood as structural trends subject to data limitations and the institutional scope adopted in this study.

New research paths emerge from this study, enabling further investigation and more in-depth analysis. As an immediate next step, the same data collection could be conducted for the Brazilian Navy and Army to determine whether a broader ideological realignment occurred in military cooperation activities or whether the traditional military pragmatism of the Armed Forces prevailed. It would also be possible to examine whether the same alignment occurred in other forms of cooperation outside the defense sector. Another issue that could be investigated in future studies

is the influence of this rapprochement on Brazil's other partners, such as BRICS countries, for example.

Future research may also determine whether the influence of different political groups during a given administration is capable of altering the historical tradition of a country's foreign policy. Similarly, from a different perspective, further studies could examine longer periods of government to determine the length of time required for an administration to alter the historical trajectory of its international relations.

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