



The “New Brazilian Foreign Policy” and the pursuit of an Anti-Denialist Paradiplomacy

A “Nova Política Externa Brasileira” e a busca por uma Paradiplomacia Anti-Negacionista

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Abstract: Subnational governments, such as Brazilian cities and states, are occupying spaces and acting directly in activities that previously were states domains. Jair Bolsonaro’s election has changed many governmental aspects, and foreign policy represents a sphere of great turnaround. The article’s hypothesis is that the less conciliatory and progressively aggressive tone added to an agenda of the so-called “New Brazilian Foreign Policy” between 2019 and 2021 promoted federative imbalances that clashed with subnational governments’ interests. Consequently, states have increased their projections and international dialogues, generating new attributes to this process commonly called paradiplomacy. This was the case of northeastern states that, through the Northeast Consortium, promoted opposite international actions in relation to the central government. Based on bibliographic review and prospection of news media, this article aims to demonstrate that such international actions were alternatives adopted in opposition to the guidelines of Bolsonaro's foreign policy and Ernesto Araújo’s diplomatic agenda. The debate and the investigation support contemporary studies on subnational actors in Brazil, bringing light to a new phase of paradiplomacy often framed as a practice of contestation, antagonism, or confrontation to the central government, dismaying of denialist discourses.

Keywords: Paradiplomacy; States; Northeast Consortium; Brazilian Foreign Policy; Bolsonaro Government.

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Resumo: Governos subnacionais, como cidades e estados brasileiros, ocupam espaços e agem mais diretamente em atividades que antes competiam majoritariamente aos Estados. A eleição de Jair Bolsonaro modificou muitos aspectos governamentais, sendo que a política externa representa uma esfera de grande reviravolta. Partimos da hipótese de que o tom menos conciliador e progressivamente agressivo adicionado a uma agenda empregada à “Nova Política Externa Brasileira” entre 2019 e 2021 promoveram desequilíbrios federativos que se chocaram com interesses dos governos subnacionais. Consequentemente, os governos estaduais aumentaram suas projeções e diálogos internacionais, gerando novos contornos ao processo comumente denominado de paradiplomacia. Esse foi o caso dos estados nordestinos que, por meio do Consórcio Nordeste, promoveram ações internacionais de relativa contraposição ao governo federal. Valendo-se de revisão bibliográfica e prospecção de notícias na mídia, procuramos demonstrar que tais ações internacionais foram alternativas adotadas em oposição às orientações da política exterior do Governo Bolsonaro e da agenda diplomática de Ernesto Araújo. O debate proposto e os resultados encontrados servem para sustentar os estudos contemporâneos sobre atores subnacionais no Brasil, trazendo luz a um novo período de sua paradiplomacia por vezes enquadrada como uma prática de contestação, antagonismo ou confronto ao governo central, desvencilhando-se dos discursos negacionistas.

Palavras-chave: Paradiplomacia; Governos Estaduais; Consórcio Nordeste; Política Externa Brasileira; Governo Bolsonaro.

1. Introduction

The development of Brazilian subnational entities internationalization highlights the demand to better understand this phenomenon. Although in the 1990s and 2000s the internationalization of cities had been consolidated and became a more common practice, the states of the federation have also drawn attention for their incursions into the external sphere. In this sense, the literature is developing approaches to comprehend up to what extent such activities influence the decision-making processes, including Brazilian Foreign Policy itself.

This shift of focus in this area comes in part from the advances presented in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) studies over the past few decades. According to Ferreira (2020:13, free translated) in his recent analysis: “The state is complex, demands a cautious interpretative analysis and is composed of actors and processes that vividly interact beyond static perceptions of reality”. Foreign Policy needs to elucidate interests, preferences, influences, and levels of analysis that comprise the international action of states, but that also represents processes developed within them.

We can comprehend foreign policy as a set of actions and decisions of a certain actor, not necessarily the state, in relation to other states or external actors formulated

from domestic and/or international influence (Pinheiro, 2004). Traditionally, it has already been understood as “state policy” for acting in sensitive domains such as territorial integrity and state sovereignty (Souza Filho, 2020). However, a country’s foreign policy must represent the synthesis of diverse and often contradictory interests (Gonçalves & Teixeira, 2020). This constitutive character of foreign policy makes it susceptible to changes depending on the governments of the moment, being linked to other governmental spheres, and even to society (Mercher & Pereira, 2018).

In Brazil, exists a historical tradition of relative continuity in foreign policy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE), something that goes back to the Baron of Rio Branco Era (Lima & Albuquerque, 2019). However, Jair Bolsonaro presidency has abandoned that tradition. In 2019, several controversial statements of the Federal Government – represented by the president himself or by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernesto Araújo, which remained in office between January of that year and March 2021 – were remarkable and responsible for the erosion of Brazil’s international image. The diplomatic actions implemented by Ernesto Araújo seemed to follow what Lima and Albuquerque (2019:17, free translated) entitled the “strategy of chaos”. The purposes pursued by foreign policy were to keep the loyalty and turmoil of the President’s electorate.

Those changes affected diverse sectors and actors, among which we emphasize the Brazilian subnational governments. Local and state leaders and managers of different political parties have started to systematically oppose the government, what is nothing new, but rather something trivial in *politics*. Although, the implementation of international actions and activities by the federative entities evidenced a way to achieve certain objectives in a context of questioning the effectiveness of the foreign policy agenda proposed by the Bolsonaro government (Gonçalves & Teixeira, 2020). In this sense we show a possible breaking point in Brazilian paradiplomacy, which had been complementary to the Brazilian foreign policy at least since the re-democratization.

If the foreign policy agenda initiated during the Bolsonaro government broke its traditional and historical basis in Brazil, did such a change also mean a turn in the cooperative pattern of Brazilian paradiplomacy? We seek to demonstrate that the international actions of Brazilian federative entities, especially the state governments of the Northeast Interstate Consortium for Sustainable Development (NICSD), were alternatives adopted in opposition to the foreign policy guidelines of Bolsonaro’s

government, including Araújo’s diplomatic juncture. We propose the hypothesis that the less conciliatory and progressively aggressive tone added to an agenda employed to the so-called “New Brazilian Foreign Policy” between January 2019 and March 2021 promoted federative imbalances and displeased subnational governments’ interests.

The research is based on literature review, including conceptual aspects of paradiplomacy and foreign policy, as well as on the prospect of news published in digital media and newspapers. Website information of the Northeast Consortium, Bolsonaro’s public positions and Araújo’s statements were also taken as support material and taken into consideration for the conjunctural analysis of the theme.

Besides this introduction, the first section is dedicated to present the concept and the development of paradiplomacy, its definitions and applications in Brazil, briefly describing its relationship with the Consortium. Subsequently, the foreign policy of the Bolsonaro Government and the diplomacy of Ernesto Araújo are analyzed, presenting the most relevant facts in the previously delimited analysis time (2019-2021). The third section is dedicated to the actions of the Northeast Consortium, both in terms of federative dialogue – and especially – of international relations. We conclude that the object of study portrayed here opens room for future investigations, represents an alternative to the foreign policy of the Bolsonaro government, and raises a Brazilian paradiplomacy conjuncture with an anti-denialist bias.

2. Paradiplomacy and the Northeast Consortium

The last decades of the twentieth century have seen the emergence of a phenomenon that connects internal and external political aspects: the internationalization of subnational governments. Due to a process of reallocation of power relations among states, the last two centuries have witnessed a relativization of their sovereignty. This is related to the fact that central governments no longer had the capacity to respond in isolation to the demands of the international system. Thus, as the state could no longer be the unique provider of essential goods and services to the population, there was maneuver for the emergence of a new order that abstracted the dividing line between national and international to understand the relationships between international subjects and actors.

However, authors such as Fronzaglia et al. (2006) point out that the international action of subnational entities is historical. Even in Ancient Greece, cities and city-states were already associated economically and commercially. What is considered new is, in fact, the quantity of these governments acting in the international arena, as well as the

quality and scope of their external actions (Gomes Filho, 2011). Efforts to build a conceptual framework on the international activities of subnational entities only gained ground in the mid-1980s, stimulated by the intensification of these activities (Prado, 2020). In any case, it can be stated that scientific and academic investigations about the phenomenon are recent and increasingly growing, including in Brazil.

Distinctly the historical practice defended by Fronzaglia et al (2006), the concept of "paradiplomacy" only gained notoriety in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, in order to designate the foreign actions of subnational governments, Soldatos was the first academic to coin the terminology as an abbreviation of the term "parallel diplomacy" (Soldatos, 1990). According to the author, paradiplomacy corresponds the plurality of voices in foreign policy represented by non-central governmental units of a state, which support, complement, correct, duplicate, or challenge diplomacy. Nowadays such units are commonly defined as subnational actors, such as cities, regions, federal states, provinces, and departments. Later, this term was also adopted and attached to the works of Ivo Duchacek, recognizing the better compatibility of this concept to the activities developed by subnational governments analogously to traditional diplomacy (Prado, 2020).

In addition to Soldatos (1990), several authors also began to investigate the concept in question. However, the adoption of this new terminology was not established without criticism. For some authors, the term, being the nomenclature of "parallel diplomacy", suggests the existence of conflict between the national and subnational political levels, implicitly presuming the presence of incompatible interests (Bueno, 2010).

Paradiplomacy research ceased to focus on North American academia only after the early 1990s. This change only occurred due to the end of the Cold War and the acceleration of integration processes in Europe, inciting the development of new research poles in this same field (Kuznetsov, 2015). In addition to this geographical decentralization, paradiplomacy has acquired other analytical approaches aimed at subnational governments, consolidating them also as participants in foreign policy decision-making processes. Studies on paradiplomacy considering federations began to deal with the idea of foreign policy democratization by contemplating the different interests, levels, and actors present within the state (Oddone, 2016).

This connection between the international and domestic arenas provided new delineations for the inclusion of paradiplomacy on Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), as

mentioned in the introduction. Here it is worth mentioning the research of Mercher and Pereira (2018: 200) that, although designed for specific study of a local government - the city of Rio de Janeiro - brings important arguments to evaluate the internationalization of state governments. In general, and with the recent processes of globalization and interdependence, the authors point out the existing interconnections between FPA itself, Public Policy Analysis (PPA) and Paradplomacy Analysis (PDA).

Brazil was inserted in this process of studies dynamization in the area because is a Latin American country and has a federal political system. However, international actions of Brazilian state governments are identified since the Old Republic (1889-1930), which makes the country, as pointed out by Ironildes Bueno (2010), one of the rare cases of intense international engagement of subnational actors that occurred in a period before contemporary globalization.

Nevertheless, with the military coup in 1964 a high level of centralization was established in the Brazilian government, making any kind of international engagement of subnational governments impossible (Prado, 2020). It was only with the re-democratization in the 1980s, the consequent political decentralization and economic stability initiated in the 1990s that Brazilian paradplomacy began to develop again (Tavares, 2014).

This framework corroborates Bueno's (2010) theoretical perspective on paradplomacy in emerging countries, managing to characterize the Brazilian scenario in a appropriate way. According to the author, the panoramic approach to paradplomacy in emerging states reveals seven central aspects, three of which are indispensable for understanding its development in Brazil: the dynamics of democratization as a driving factor of paradplomacy; the strong role of globalization and regionalization forces; and the prevalence of economic paradplomacy.

Furthermore the factors presented above, sub-regional differences can also be understood as indispensable aspects for understanding Brazilian paradplomacy. The North of the country, for example, generally develops activities aimed at integrating the Amazon and Caribbean regions. According to Prado (2020), the international involvement of subnational governments, however, is more intense and diversified in the Southeast region, occurring through articulation mechanisms such as trade promotion, technical cooperation, and investment and political strengthening through participation in international networks of cities. In turn, the South, seeks to intensify relations with

countries from the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). Such initiatives also explore commercial alternatives that, together with the Northeast and Central-West regions aimed at promoting foreign trade, already confirm the preponderance of economic paradiplomacy in the country. Still regarding the cities, their cross-border ties are more expressive exactly in the region of the Brazilian Southern Arc, with greater interlocutions with Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina.

In the Northeast region, the convergence among governors and the elaboration of common public policies have been strengthened in the last two decades, mainly in the scope of the Northeast Governors Forum, started in 2005 and more focused on administrative and institutional aspects (Rossi & Silva, 2020). Inclusively, such initiative was of extreme importance for the creation of the Northeast Consortium on March 14, 2019, the date on which the Northeast Governors' Charter was signed in São Luís do Maranhão.

The Northeast Consortium brings together nine states – Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Pernambuco, Sergipe, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Piauí – under a broad platform of public policies linked to issues such as education, health, public security, and sustainable development. One of the basic purposes of the initiative is to increase cooperation and attract foreign investment to the region, as well as to make collective purchases and lower the cost of its operations. The organization has been defined as a “political and legal instrument for the strengthening” of the region, aiming to “improve the delivery of public services to citizens” and provide “protection and promotion of the rights of the people of the Northeast” (Northeast Governors Forum, 2019, free translated).

Besides drawing attention for its uniqueness, being the first public consortium in the country composed only of state representatives (Clementino, 2019), something that was also noticeable in the Consortium was the political profile of the governors contrary to the stance and policy guidelines adopted by the President of the Republic. Such disagreement is evident already in the Northeast Governors' Letter, the Consortium's constitutive document, in which the nine governors criticized the changes in the Disarmament Statute and the Social Security Reform proposed by the Federal Government (Fróes, Cardoso & Barbosa, 2019). Although the institution is a legal entity conditioned to administer public services, as established by Law Number 11.107/2005 in Brazil, as well as its focus is to stimulate regional development, its international

performance amid tensions with the federal government progressively developed, something that would become even more expressive with the pandemic.

3. The “New Brazilian Foreign Policy” (2019-2021)

The arrival of Jair Bolsonaro as President of the Republic represented an abrupt change in the direction of Brazilian foreign policy. Although the former head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE) was given to a career diplomat, Ernesto Araújo, the postures adopted by the former minister were contrary to the historical background of Brazilian diplomacy, based on cooperative, zealous, universalist, pacifist and planned for development (Cervo, 2008).

Araújo's so-called "New Brazilian Foreign Policy" was marked by unfriendly pronouncements, contrary to multilateralism, to the environmental agenda and based on "values" such as freedom, being the most recurrent. In his welcome speech, Araújo stated that "we are not here to work for the global order. This is Brazil. [...] From now on, Itamaraty returns to the bosom of the beloved homeland" (Araújo, 2019: 1, free translated). Here we have the announcement of the anti-multilateral and supposedly more nationalistic character, according to President Bolsonaro's (2018) own campaign platform.

Also in the opening speech there is a term that has become commonplace in Araújo's speeches: "globalism", being "[...] economic globalization captured by Marxism [...]" having been born "[...] when capitalist globalization, forgetting the spirit, unconsciously surrendered to communism in its post-Soviet metastasis [...] which always aimed to occupy capitalism from the inside instead of confronting it from the outside, and today is succeeding [...]" (Araújo, 2021a: 701, free translated).

Globalism would encompass a series of trends such as "climatism (the use of the climate issue as an instrument of economic control); anti-national multilateralism (distortion and manipulation of the multilateral system composed of international organizations); abortionism and gender ideology" (Araújo, 2021a: 699-700, free translated). Although the argument is configured as a series of conspiracy theories, this rhetoric was reflected in the acts of the government's foreign policy.

The most evident aspect of this new positioning was the complete alignment to the US, most notably to Donald Trump (2017-2020). The nationalist bias of President Bolsonaro and Ernesto Araújo proved to be only a rhetorical artifice, since the relationship with the US proved to be one of complete subservience. It is also interesting

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to note that in the government plan entitled "The Path to Prosperity" there is a section called "The New Itamaraty" emphasizing three aspects: redirecting axes of partnership, stimulating bilateral relations, and fostering foreign trade. The country is mentioned next to only two others: "We will stop praising murderous dictatorships and despising or even attacking important democracies such as the USA, Israel and Italy. We will no longer make spurious trade agreements or hand over the heritage of the Brazilian people to international dictators." (Bolsonaro, 2018: 79, free translated).

Though bilateral relations have generally been disproportionate, the position of the Bolsonaro government has been to defer to U.S. interests, without at least negotiating significant counterparts. An example is the Technology Safeguards Agreement between the two countries signed in 2019, which grants the Alcântara Aerospace Launching Base for commercial use by the Americans, without the need for technology transfer (Vilela, 2021).

As another exponent of the absence of reciprocity, Bolsonaro signed a decree during a visit to Washington to meet Donald Trump exempting entry visas into the country for U.S., Japanese, Canadian, and Australian tourists, even though there was no expectation of retribution from the U.S. government (Mazui, 2019). Brazil also agreed to forgo special "developing country" treatment at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in exchange for the U.S. government's promise of support for Brazil's entry into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Albeit publicly promised, the U.S. did not endorse the Brazilian candidacy at first (O Globo, 2019), only confirming the support on January 15, 2020.

Although the OECD promise did not materialize, Trump's intention to make Brazil a Major non-North American Treaty Organization (NATO) ally was officially announced on September 31, 2019 (Agência Brasil, 2019). The achievement was treated as a foreign policy triumph for the administration and a way to demonstrate that the alignment was bringing results. However, Teixeira (2019) argues that we should enquire how much the Major non-NATO ally status really assembles Brazilian needs beyond greater military cooperation with the U.S., given the possibility of entering conflicts that are not country's interest.

The complete alignment was also evident with the Brazilian vote in the 2019 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in favor of the economic embargo imposed by the U.S. in Cuba. It was the first time that Brazil voted in favor of the embargo since

the UNGA began voting in 1992, meaning that opposition to the embargo was a historical stance of Brazilian foreign policy, regardless of governmental changes. Besides the U.S. itself, only Brazil and Israel voted in favor of the Cuban embargo (Schneider, 2019).

In addition to Israel and the United States, Araújo also sought to treat Hungary and Poland as Brazilian strategic partners. Viktor Orbán and Andrzej Duda, their respective leaders, are far-right politicians who share Araújo's same ideas of fighting "globalism" (Desideri, 2020). Cooperation with Budapest and Warsaw sought to promote an ultraconservative and religious agenda in multilateral forums, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). As one example, in 2019 Brazil operated to veto the use of the term "gender" and use of phrases such as "sexual and reproductive health services" in UNHRC resolutions (Chad, 2019), a clear reflection of the former Chancellor's discourse of opposition to what he calls "abortionism" and "gender ideology."

Brazil's stance on climate and environmental issues, which the Chancellor referred to as climate change ideology or "climatism" (Araújo, 2020: 400, free translated), is another aspect of Brazilian foreign policy that has been completely changed under Bolsonaro. Beyond speeches, such as the one in which the former Chancellor said there was no global warming because he went to Rome and was cold (Correio Braziliense, 2019), concrete actions taken by the government have compromised Brazil's international reputation regarding environment preservation.

Even before Bolsonaro's inauguration, Brazil withdrew its candidacy to host the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Climate Convention (COP-25) in 2019. At the time, the government claimed budget constraints and administration transition to give up hosting the event (Agência Brasil, 2018), indicating what was the new federal administration's view about environmental discussions. After the inauguration, the federal government also canceled the holding of the Climate Week in Salvador, although it turned back soon after.

However, it was with the Amazon fires that the environmental problem reached its peak in the foreign policy of the Bolsonaro government. Although all monitoring agencies pointed to a significant increase in forest fires, Bolsonaro, Araújo, and the Former Minister of Environment, Ricardo Salles, insisted on denying the data and started an offensive against the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), the body

responsible for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon through satellite images (DW, 2019).

The Brazilian government's denialist position towards the burning in the Amazon has earned criticism from European leaders, such as Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel. The French president took the issue of burning as a topic for discussion at the 2019 G7 meeting, drawing support from the German chancellor and the prime ministers of the United Kingdom and Canada (G1, 2019). Due to that, after the initial signing of the Agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, placed by the government itself as a great achievement of Bolsonaro's foreign policy, the interregional partnership stagnated, with no forecast for its full ratification because this depends on the endorsement of national - and some subnational – European parliaments.

Relations with France were badly shaken during this period with Bolsonaro and Salles offending the French First Lady, and the Brazilian President abruptly canceling a meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. The behavior also led to the suspension of more than 200 million Reais (R\$) of transfers from Norway and Germany to the Amazon Fund, a mechanism that seeks to finance actions to combat deforestation in the Amazon Forest, threatening the existence and continuity of the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) in the region (Figueiredo, 2019).

The denialism of Bolsonaro and Araújo's government was not limited to environmental agendas. The COVID-19 pandemic launched the Brazilian government into a new wave of derangements and insistent attacks on the main trading partner: China. Even before it began, the president and other governments members were already harassing the country, a demonstration of the alignment with the politics undertaken by the Trump administration towards the Chinese. During the presidential campaign, Bolsonaro visited Taiwan, which was seen by the Beijing government as a violation of the "One China" principle (Cobra, 2018), generating a previously non-existent insecurity (Vidigal, 2019).

In November 2020, in a text published in his personal blog, *Metapolítica* 17, Ernesto Araújo said that the pandemic opened space for what he calls "communavirus", a "communist-globalist project of appropriation of the pandemic to completely subvert liberal democracy and the market economy" (Araújo, 2021a: 165, free translated). For him, "the virus appears, in fact, as an immense opportunity to accelerate the globalist

project", besides that "[...] under the pretext of the pandemic, the new communism tries to build a world without nations, without freedom, without spirit [...]. A permanent global state of exception, transforming the world into a profound concentration camp (Araújo, 2021a: 172, free translated).

Federal Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, at the time President of the Foreign Relations Committee of the House of Representatives, blamed China for the emergence of the virus (Benites, 2020), an attitude that was followed by the Former Minister of Education, Abraham Weintraub, who ridiculed the way some Chinese speak Portuguese, and insinuated that the pandemic was part of a Chinese plan for world control (G1, 2020). The repeated attacks on China by members of the Brazilian government eroded the relationship between the two countries, which damaged cooperation in actions to combat the pandemic, such as the delay in sending inputs for the manufacture of anti-Covid vaccines in Brazil, although the governments have denied the influence of political issues in this event.

Brazil's international action against the pandemic has also generated friction with other important partners, such as India and South Africa. Brazil opposed the Indian and South African proposal in the WTO to temporarily suspend Covid-19 vaccine patents (DW, 2021b). This possibly influenced the Indian decision to prioritize sending doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine to other countries, which was symbolized by sending a plane to import the doses from India earlier than agreed with the national health authorities (DW, 2021a).

Araújo's ruptures in conducting the country's foreign policy reached the peak considering to not participate in the international consortium for the purchase of vaccines against COVID-19, the Covax Facility, because it was led by the World Health Organization (WHO). His view was that participation in the consortium would strengthen the organization's role, even if it meant depriving Brazil's access to vaccines (Amado, 2021).

Trump's defeat in the U.S. elections materialized a certain isolation degree of Brazil in the global scenario and stimulated the country's international “pariah status” in the words of Ernesto Araújo himself when he said the following: “[...] it is good to be a pariah. And this pariah here, this Brazil; this foreign policy of the Brazilian people, this Severina foreign policy, let's say, has achieved results” (Araújo, 2021a: 508). Despite the former Minister's insistence that his conduct of foreign policy led to good results,

pressures from the National Congress and Itamaraty itself led him to resign from his position on March 29. In a post on April 10, 2021, again in his personal blog, Araújo (2021b: s/p, free translated) made a management balance and said that he created "[...] bridges with the whole world. I built bridges with rulers, thinkers, entrepreneurs, opinion makers, officials, parliamentarians, scientists from Brazil and dozens of countries, and with journalists, when sincere and professional." If such bridges were indeed created, they do not correspond to the relations with most Brazilian governors.

4. Anti-Denialist Paradiplomacy *vis-à-vis* Bolsonaro's Foreign Policy

The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 recognized that states and municipalities are autonomous entities, but in the document there is no legal and normative basis about their international projections, since the Carta Magna is very clear in stating that the conduct of foreign policy is the responsibility of central entities such as the Presidency of the Republic and the National Congress.

Nevertheless, the internationalization of Brazilian subnational governments is a consolidated and historically established process, as exemplified by the classic cases of internationalization of cities such as Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Campinas, Belo Horizonte, Santo André, and Maringá in the 1990s and 2000s, founders of the first bureaucratic structures focused on the international dimension, and even the participation of local governments in certain networks of cities, such as Mercocities and the URB-AL Project.

Although the cases mentioned refer to local governments, this reality also includes state governments. According to Bueno (2010: 258), at the end of the 2000s, his sample showed that 17 Brazilian states had a Secretariat or Advisory of International Relations. In a newer investigation, Fróio (2015) concluded that the paradiplomacy undertaken by the states differed around the level of development, the geographic location, and the political party in charge of the governmental management. In short, the 2010s already empirically demonstrated a strong international insertion of state governments, which has been progressively credited by academic analysis. Although public consortia have their actions focused on internal development and public policies, they also opened a new possible path for subnational internationalization, providing an international arena to states and municipalities achieve their outcomes and objectives.

The Northeast Consortium is appointed here as a possible alternative for the coordination of the consortium entities' actions in the motivation of an anti-negationist

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paradiplomacy, established at the expense of the positions and the "New Brazilian Foreign Policy". Accordingly to Clementino (2019), for example, one of the factors anchoring the bet on the success of the Northeast Consortium is the economic and political crisis in the country, which forces joint governmental management outputs by its political leaderships.

In contrast to the positions adopted by Itamaraty, the Northeastern state leaders assumed a more pragmatic posture in the Consortium's international activities. Environmental and climate issues are some of the aspects that most represent this disparity between the actions of the Federal Government and the Northeast Consortium. Thus, while the former neglected the advance of wildfires and invasions of indigenous lands, weakened the Ministry of the Environment and adopted a series of other measures that demonstrated its disregard for the environment, the Consortium sought solutions to circumvent the environmental crisis. In March 2021, for example, Wellington Dias (PT), governor of Piauí and president of the Northeast Consortium at the time, signed ordinances installing the chambers that aim to articulate pacts among the consortium states, formulate and support the implementation of environmental public policies and other established technical areas (Andrade & Costa, 2021).

Internationally, while President Jair Bolsonaro started an environmental crisis with European counterparts, this agenda of the Northeast Consortium was inserted in one of the meetings in Paris. At that moment, Rui Costa, governor of Bahia and former President of the Consortium, signed a cooperation letter with the Secretary of State of France in order to cooperate in the areas of environment and sustainable city. The act was part of the mission that the Northeastern governors carried out in Europe, until then the Consortium's first international exercise (Northeast Consortium, 2019a).

The governors also sought to promote the region to raise investments and establish public-private partnerships, aiming to develop the regional infrastructure of highways, energy, and internet connectivity, as well as foster the tourism potential and investment possibilities in the areas of health, education, public security, and agricultural development. The mission took place between November 18 and 22, 2019 with meetings between governors and representatives from France, Italy, and Germany (Consórcio Nordeste, 2019b). There was no concretization of agreements - which really did not seem to be the goal of the mission -, only signposts of investment and cooperation intentions,

but the mission was an important gesture by the Consortium to promote the image of the Northeast as a safe and able region to receive investments and willing to cooperate abroad.

Yet, it was with the pandemic that the clash between the Northeast Consortium and the Federal Government became more evident. This occurred due to the lack of coordination on the part of the Brazilian government and its denialist posture. Thus, seeking to minimize the socio-economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 crisis in the country, the group established the Scientific Committee of the Northeast Consortium (C4NE) in March 2020, composed of experts from different fields of knowledge. The C4NE had been fulfilling the function of advising the consortium states in the adoption of measures for the prevention, control, and containment of public health risks, aiming to structure the health system for the care of the population and prevent the spread of the disease (Consórcio Nordeste, 2021^a), although the departure of Miguel Nicolelis, the coordinator until February 2021, has been a point of relative weakening in the continuity of its functions.

Even with Nicolelis' departure, C4NE maintained the Mandacaru Project, a voluntary scientific collaboration platform that, among other objectives, aimed to combat misinformation and make predictions about the behavior of the COVID-19 pandemic, assisting managers in general and state and municipal managers in the Northeast (Northeast Consortium, 2021b). In addition to strengthening regional technical capacity, the Northeast Consortium also sought state political projection and greater federative dialogue (Rossi & Silva, 2020). The "Monitora Covid-19" application (app) can be seen in this way, since it was an initiative of the Consortium for the entire country, with the goal of tracking the registration of people infected by the virus and disseminating information about forms of prevention.

Following this same approach, the Northeast Consortium sought to formalize, in March 2021, the purchase of 37 million doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. The information was confirmed by the president of the Consortium himself with the former Health Minister, Eduardo Pazzuelo, so that the vaccines would integrate the National Immunization Plan (PNI), which could be distributed around the country (Ramos, 2021). This type of action gained even more evidence before the record of deaths and infected by the coronavirus, as well as the positioning of Bolsonaro, who himself, since the beginning of the pandemic, had been rejecting the social isolation measures and the use

of masks, besides defending the use of hydroxychloroquine for the treatment of the disease.

The Consortium also stood out in the search for good relations with China. While central Brazilian government nominees were dedicated to defaming the country and hindering any kind of cooperation aimed at fighting the pandemic, the Northeast Consortium acted in the opposite way and sought the Chinese support. In a letter sent to the Ambassador of China in Brazil, Yang Wanming, the Governor of Bahia and President of the Consortium at the time, Rui Costa, requested help in sending medical equipment and other supplies needed to combat the virus and said that he had "[...] admiration for the way the Chinese people faced the pandemic and the immense friendship that unites our peoples" (Correio, 2020: 01, free translated). The gesture was an attempt to repair the damage in the relationship created by the Federal Government, which was well received by the Chinese Ambassador, Yang Wanming, who replied the letter saying that they would try to satisfy the requests.

The federal omission in coordinating a national strategy to fight the pandemic, as well as the difficulty in establishing partnerships internationally, made the governors act on their own to ensure that essential equipment was not missing in the states. The Northeast Consortium even closed a contract to import three hundred respirators, which in the end did not materialize because was a supplier company's fraud (Aguiar, 2020).

The most emblematic case of the Northeastern governors' actions during the pandemic was the import of respirators by the governor of Maranhão. Although it was carried out exclusively by the state government, the operation is a symbol of subnational entities international action and, in this case, of a Consortium member. Governor Flávio Dino stated at the time that the Federal Government should have encouraged national industries to manufacture the equipment, in addition to coordinating purchases, which would avoid the rush of states to acquire the respirators (Aguiar, 2020).

Maranhão imported hospital equipment and changed the route of the merchandise so that it would pass through Ethiopia, in the African Horn region. The justification was to escape what Alvarenga et al. (2020: 17, free translated) called "[...] 'modern piracy' caused by the U.S. and Germany". The U.S. and German governments were confiscating all kinds of medical supplies for their own use against the pandemic in their territories.

Even with a short time of creation and performance, the Northeast Consortium has been gaining relevance by showing itself as an active political actor. Still, this diligence

in activities has also undergone stressful processes, such as the already mentioned exit of Nicolelis from C4NE, the cancellation of the purchase of some supplies in the fight against the pandemic, or even the internal skepticism of some state governments. For example, in Sergipe, some congressmen declared their support for the exit of the Northeast Consortium due to the noncompliance with some proposed objectives (Villacorte, 2020).

Nonetheless, it is possible to affirm with examples cited that the agenda of the "New Brazilian Foreign Policy" clashed directly with the interests of the governors involved in the consortium, impacting the international activities sought and implemented. At least three factors must be highlighted: the search for dialogue with European peers in the midst of environmental degradation and the climate crisis, the contours carried out to attenuate relations with China, and the stimulus for resources to tackle the pandemic, which compelled the states to act internationally, whether in the search for essential equipment or in negotiating vaccines, something that would not be of extreme urgency if the Federal Government exercised the role of national coordination.

5. Final Considerations

The specific literature on paradiplomacy in Brazil still seeks to understand the current international insertion of municipalities and states in the face of Jair Bolsonaro's government. In forums and debates, terms such as “confrontation paradiplomacy” are cited to refer to the context previously portrayed and analyzed here. In a recent analysis, Mariana Barros (2021:73, free translated) affirms that nowadays there is “[...] a kind of international action of the states in which there is a clear confrontation with the federal government”, a conjuncture that the author names “paradiplomacy of resistance”. Similarly, the approach of Sousa and Rodrigues (2021:39, free translated) ratifies the study undertaken here, because analyzing the case of the relation between the Federal Government and the internationalization of São Paulo state, they mention that “[...] subnational governments use paradiplomacy to exercise their federal autonomy in a scenario of humanitarian crisis, in which the conflict with the Union is justified by the lack of federal government to fight COVID-19”.

We proposed the use of the term “anti-denialist paradiplomacy” not with the intention of generating a neologism, even because this debate seems to be exhausted in the area, but rather to demonstrate that political actions, adopted speeches, and narratives stimulated by the Federal Government in the “New Brazilian Foreign Policy”

were framed as denialist guidelines in three main aspects: the non-acceptance of climate change, the repulsion to multilateralism, and the discredit to science in the fight against the pandemic.

The Northeast Consortium emerged and developed its first activities in this context, and it is impossible to disentangle them because even in June 2019 Bolsonaro stated that the governors themselves aimed to divide and segment the country, which ended up becoming a permanent feature of his government: the constant blaming of the governors. Therefore, although the creation of the Consortium refers to past times of greater dialogue between the governors and the search for Northeastern development, political and interest differences have proved to be fundamental in this process. The abandonment of Brazilian diplomatic traditions opened space for subnational internationalization more focused on certain adjustments of foreign policy directions and mainly on the search for contours to the social disarray caused by the pandemic and the lack of vaccination.

Thus, we attest the hypothesis that the less conciliatory and progressively aggressive tone added to an agenda employed to the so-called “New Brazilian Foreign Policy” between January 2019 and March 2021 promoted certain federative imbalances and displeased certain interests of the subnational governments. It was in this context that the Northeast Consortium inserted itself and undertook its initial activities seeking foreign fundraising and international cooperation.

It is important to say that the subject is not exhausted in this analysis. This conjuncture of Brazilian paradiplomacy opens a range of research that will possibly have analytical space in the future. In the first place, studies that relate public consortia, whether municipal, state or mixed, with international relations are still scarce. Second, international insertion of subnational governments can be an object of study to a literature that increasingly advocates the characterization of Foreign Policy as Public Policy, bringing the FPA closer to the PPA. Finally, the political-party indicator as an influential variable in the way subnational governments carry out their foreign excursions has also been addressed in the literature of the area and should cover both municipalities and state governments, something that strongly denotes the link observed among the nine states of Northeast Consortium. The paths are multiple and only confirm the continuity and the permanence of this agenda in International Relations studies.

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