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Brazilian diplomacy and Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine

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Abstract. The significance of the research topic is predetermined by the importance of the problem of building relations between the Russian Federation and the countries of the Global South during the period of aggravation of the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West, especially after the start of a Special Military Operation in Ukraine (SMO) in February 2022. The research endeavors to determine the nature of Brazil's policy towards Russia, Ukraine and the SMO, and to identify which factors influenced this policy in 2022–2024. Based on the analysis of UN documents, parliamentary materials and trade and economic statistics, the author comes to conclusion that an official stance of the president (Planalto), regardless of political and ideological orientation of whoever held the office (right-wing populist J. Bolsonaro or left-centrist L.I. Lula da Silva), was seemingly neutral, equidistant from either side of the conflict, but in fact, rather pro-Russian, as evidenced primarily by an obvious unwillingness to blame Moscow for the Ukrainian crisis. The balance of information indicates that the Planalto's caution in developing Brazil's policy towards the SMO was caused, on the one hand, by strong pressure from the pro-Ukrainian members of the National Congress and its unwillingness to aggravate relations with the West, and, on the other, by Brazil's economic dependence on the Russian Federation, primarily on the supply of mineral fertilizers, of great importance to Brazil's agribusiness. Thus, unlike a number of Western researchers, the author infers that the leading role in determining Brazil's position towards the events in Ukraine and, in general, to the geopolitical confrontation between the Russian Federation and the West was played by internal (political and economic), and not foreign policy factors.

Keywords: Brazil — Russia, diplomacy, SMO, UN, Bolsonaro, geopolitics

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Бразильская дипломатия и специальная военная операция России на Украине

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Аннотация. Значимость темы исследования предопределяется важностью проблемы выстраивания отношений между Российской Федерацией и странами Глобального Юга в период обострения геополитического противостояния России и Запада, особенно после начала специальной военной операции на Украине (СВО) в феврале 2022 г. Цель исследования — определить характер политики Бразилии по отношению к СВО, России и Украине и выявить факторы, которые влияли на эту политику в 2022–2024 гг. Опираясь на анализ документов ООН, парламентских материалов и торгово-экономической статистики, автор пришел к выводу, что позиция президентской власти (Планалту), независимо от политико-идеологической ориентации ее носителя (правый популист Ж. Болсонару или левоцентрист Л.И. Лула да Силва), внешне являлась нейтральной, равноудаленной от двух сторон конфликта, однако в действительности скорее пророссийской, что выразилось в первую очередь в явном нежелании возлагать на Москву вину за украинский кризис. Баланс информации свидетельствует, что осторожность Планалту при выработке политики Бразилии по отношению к СВО была вызвана, с одной стороны, сильным давлением проукраински настроенной части депутатского корпуса и нежеланием обострять отношения с Западом, а с другой — экономической зависимостью Бразилии от Российской Федерации, прежде всего от поставок минеральных удобрений, имеющих огромное значение для агробизнеса Бразилии. Таким образом, в отличие от ряда западных исследователей, автор приходит к выводу, что ведущую роль при определении позиции Бразилии по отношению к событиям на Украине и в целом к геополитическому противостоянию Российской Федерации и Запада играли внутренние (политические и экономические), а не внешнеполитические факторы.

Ключевые слова: Бразилия — Россия, СВО, ООН, Болсонару, геополитика

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Introduction

Russia's relations with the states of Global South amid geopolitical confrontation with the West induced by Special Military Operation conducted in Ukraine (SMO) is one of the key issues for Moscow's foreign policy. The conflict between Russia and the West, which goes far beyond the Cold War standoff in its intensity, seems to have revived a long-forgotten geopolitical model, when bipolar confrontation appeared to be absorbing the Third World, forcing its states to choose between the two sides, whereas the phenomenon of neutrality was seen either as the result of a compromise between major players (e.g., Austria), or as a purely temporary situation until a nation could decide which side to take in the confrontation between East and West.

Today's situation, however, differs significantly from the one that existed in 1946–1991. Whereas the West has remained to some extent a cohesive geopolitical bloc (the “collective West”), the opposing force is represented by virtually a single country — Russia. Despite covert or semi-covert support from some states (Iran, DPRK, Belarus), it is hardly possible to speak of any consolidated anti-Western bloc. In this context, Global South and its position on the escalating conflict is ever more acute for Moscow than it was during the Cold War.

The focus of this article on Russia-Brazil relations is NOT an arbitrary choice; the two countries have been developing their relationship since 2002 within the framework of a strategic partnership. In 2006, Russia and Brazil became BRICS members, a move viewed by the Kremlin as a harbinger for an anti-Western alliance of the Global South. Despite certain challenges, including the issue of Brazilian meat exports to Russia, the overall relationship between the two nations remained cordial throughout the 2000s and 2010s. Consequently, the fact that Brazil adopted the least pro-Russian stance among all BRICS member states at the inception of the SMO, particularly in contrast to that of the PRC, is of particular interest and prompts the following research question: what factors contributed to this stance, namely Russian diplomatic missteps, external pressure on Brazil, or domestic political and economic considerations?

It is wrong to suggest that the history of Russia-Brazil relations in the last two decades has been totally ignored by Russian researchers. They showed considerable interest in the development of trade and economic relations between the two countries, including after the start of the SMO¹. Political relations have also been the

¹ Of the latest publications, see [1–3].

subject of serious study by Russian authors², but their state in the period 2022–2024 has not received sufficient academic coverage so far. Foreign scholars have shown more interest in Brazil's reaction to the SMO and the reasons behind its stance. In their opinion, these reasons are primarily of a foreign policy nature. O. Stünckel, for example, attributes Brazil's reluctance to take sides to its dissatisfaction with the existing liberal order and its desire to play an active role in shaping a new architecture of international relations³. M. Spector sees signs of hedging in Brazil's policy⁴. F. Krause, who, unlike Stünckel, sees Brazil's position as pro-Russian, nevertheless shares his explanation: Brazil's support for Russia, he argues, 'is part of the attempt to create a new world order' [7. P. 328]. However, these publications are quite limited in volume and represent attempts at interpretation that are not based on an in-depth analysis of primary sources. Therefore, the evidential value of their provisions remains somewhat questionable.

In light of profound significance of the problem at hand and the existing state of research in this area, this article seeks to address two fundamental questions: firstly, the essence of Brazil's stance towards the Special Military Operation (SMO), and more broadly, the country's policy towards Russia and Ukraine in the 2022–2024 period. Secondly, what factors may contributed to this stance. To this end, we have drawn upon three principal categories of primary sources: United Nations documents, materials from the Brazilian National Congress, and trade and economic statistics.

Brazil's stance on Russia-Ukraine conflict

In 2014–2021, Brazil's political leadership, whoever led it — center-left Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016), centrist Michel Temer (2016–2018) or right-wing nationalist Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022) — demonstrated external neutrality towards Russian policy in Ukraine. On 27 March 2014, when the UN General Assembly (hereinafter UNGA) voted on a resolution on Ukraine's territorial integrity, Brazil, like the rest of the BRICS members (except Russia) abstained. The rationale provided by Brazil's permanent representative to the UN A. Patriota looked like a conciliatory

² Notably [4–6].

³ Stuenkel O. How to Understand Brazil's Ukraine Policy. *Foreign Policy*. 18.05.2023. URL: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/18/russia-ukraine-war-brazil-lula-nonalignment-global-south/> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴ Spektor M. In Defense of the Fence Sitters. What the West Gets Wrong About Hedging. *Foreign Affairs*. 18.04. 2023. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/global-south-defense-fence-sitters> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

gesture towards Moscow for his country's inability to vote against the resolution: 'Brazil is closely monitoring the escalation of tensions in Ukraine. Our concern is based on our close bilateral ties with Ukraine, upgraded to a strategic partnership in 2009. Brazil and Ukraine are jointly developing high-tech projects, including in the area of space technology. Brazil is also proud to host one of the largest Ukrainian-descendant communities outside Europe'⁵. Subsequently, Brazil has consistently abstained from voting on the resolutions on Situation of Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine, on 19 December 2016, 19 December 2017, 21 December 2018, 18 December 2019, 16 December 2020, 16 December 2021 and on Problem of the Militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as Parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, on 17 December 2018, 9 December 2019, 7 December 2020, 9 December 2021.

However, Brazil's position seemed to have changed with the start of the SMO. On 25 February 2022, at the UN Security Council, unlike abstaining China and India, Brazil strongly supported a resolution demanding that Russia 'immediately, fully and unconditionally withdraw all its armed forces from Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders'. 'We are seriously concerned,' said Brazil's Permanent Representative to the UN, R. Costa Filho, 'with Russian military operations against targets on sovereign Ukrainian territory <...> The Security Council must respond swiftly to the use of force against the territorial integrity of a member state. A line has been crossed, and the Council cannot remain silent. <...> We are also deeply concerned with Russia's decision to use troops in military operations on the ground and with possible loss of life and danger to civilians. We remain firmly convinced that threats and force shall not bring about a permanent solution to this crisis. <...> The security concerns expressed by the Russian Federation over the past few years, especially with regard to strategic balance of power in Europe, do not give Russia the right to threaten the territorial integrity and sovereignty of another state'⁶. At the Security Council meeting on 27 February, Brazil's representative supported the resolution to convene an emergency session of the UNGA on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict⁷. However, the tone of his statement underwent a notable shift, as he refrained from making any direct accusations

⁵ General Assembly 10th plenary meeting. United Nations Digital Library. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/311/71/pdf/n2231171.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶ Security Council Meeting 8979. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n22/269/27/pdf/n2226927.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁷ India and China abstained again.

against Russia and instead called for negotiations ‘that could lead to the restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, as well as security guarantees for Ukraine and *Russia*’ (emphasis added). He also expressed concern over the potential impact of ‘selective sanctions that could affect commodities such as fertilizers and wheat and provoke a high risk of famine’⁸. This has become an increasingly frequent topic in the speeches of Brazilian diplomats⁹. In addition, they focused on calls for ‘both sides’ to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law, while leaving aside the question of responsibility for violations and refraining from specific accusations¹⁰.

On 2 March 2022, Brazil, in contrast to the other BRICS members (China, India and South Africa chose not to vote), cast its vote in favour of the resolution ‘Aggression against Ukraine’. However, Costa Filho took the opportunity to provide an important clarification on his country’s position: ‘While it is true that the resolution calls on the international community for peace, peace requires more than just silencing weapons and withdrawing troops. It is essential to address security concerns of all the parties involved, and the only precondition should be an immediate ceasefire. The resolution should not be interpreted as authorizing indiscriminate sanctions and the deployment of weapons; as such actions are not conducive to the resumption of constructive diplomatic dialogue and could further escalate tensions with unpredictable consequences for the region and beyond’¹¹. By saying that it is not enough to simply ‘withdraw troops’, meaning Russian troops, that it is necessary to ‘address the security concerns of the parties’, meaning not only Ukraine but also Russia, and by opposing the ‘indiscriminate use of sanctions’, meaning sanctions against Russia, the Brazilian diplomat largely distanced himself from the position taken by Western states.

⁸ Security Council Meeting 8980. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n22/270/79/pdf/n2227079.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁹ At the meeting of 29 March 2022, a Brazilian representative denounced ‘indiscriminate imposition of broad economic sanctions’. ‘Unilateral sanctions,’ he said, ‘are not only illegal from the point of view of international law — today their imposition would jeopardize access to goods necessary for the survival of a large part of the world’s population. Security Council Meeting 9008. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n22/303/16/pdf/n2230316.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

¹⁰ Security Council Meeting 9080. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n22/404/06/pdf/n2240406.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024). Security Council Meeting 9161. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n22/645/35/pdf/n2264535.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

¹¹ General Assembly 5th plenary meeting. United Nations Digital Library. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/275/23/pdf/n2227523.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

On 4 March, Brazil voted in favour of the UN Human Rights Council (hereinafter UNHRC) resolution on the ‘Situation of Human Rights in Ukraine Stemming from the Russian Aggression’ and on 24 March the General Assembly’s resolution on the ‘Humanitarian Consequences of the Aggression against Ukraine’, while China, India and South Africa abstained. Commenting on his country’s stand, Costa Filho said: ‘The General Assembly cannot be a bystander as the world witnesses the transformation of once-peaceful cities into war zones, as well as shocking images of the conflict showing the desperation of thousands of civilians trapped in war zones without food, water or electricity’. However, he expressed regret that the adopted resolution ‘went beyond humanitarian aspects of the conflict’ and that a more balanced draft proposed by South Africa was not supported. The ambassador added: ‘The text also fails to take into account a pressing issue arising from the ongoing crisis — the humanitarian impact of indiscriminate economic sanctions, which will inevitably affect all countries, especially emerging economies. Not only will they exacerbate difficulties in economies already under strain as they recover from the pandemic, but they are also likely to hit the most vulnerable communities. In an attempt to right the wrong, these broad economic sanctions may end up doing more harm than they were intended to prevent.’ ‘We must not,’ he stressed, ‘politicize humanitarian ideas or selectively apply international humanitarian law, which was created precisely to guarantee minimal standards of human dignity, no matter how inexcusable the causes of war might be’¹².

On 7 April 2022, Brazil abstained from voting on the UNGA resolution ‘Suspension of the Rights of Membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council’. Ambassador Costa Filho once again tried to have a foot in both camps. On the one hand, he stated that his country was ‘deeply concerned by allegations of gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Ukraine, including the recent reports from Bucha. The pictures of extreme violence perpetrated against civilians and the high number of deaths, many of them accompanied by signs of torture and ill-treatment, are deeply disturbing’. At the same time, he suggested waiting for the findings of the investigation of UNHRC-established commission to identify the perpetrator of human rights violations, and added: ‘We must avoid at all costs that the mistakes of the old Commission on Human Rights be repeated, especially with regard to politicization, double standards and selectivity’¹³. Brazil also opposed Russia’s exclusion from

¹² General Assembly 10th plenary meeting. United Nations Digital Library. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/311/71/pdf/n2231171.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

¹³ General Assembly 9th plenary meeting. United Nations Digital Library. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/298/72/pdf/n2229872.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

international organizations: Foreign Minister C. França advocated on 18 April that Russia should stay in the G20¹⁴, while Economy Minister P. Guedes reiterated this position on 19 April 2022 regarding Russia's participation in the IMF¹⁵.

On 2 May 2022, Brazil supported the UNHRC resolution on the 'Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Ukraine Stemming from the Russian Aggression' (India abstained while the PRC voted against). On 24 August at the UNSC meeting, Brazil voted together with India (PRC abstained) in favour of inviting Ukrainian President V. Zelensky to participate in the Council meeting via videoconference. On 12 October 2022, Brazil supported the UNGA resolution 'Territorial Integrity of Ukraine: Defending the Principles of the UN Charter' (PRC, India and South Africa abstained). Brazil's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, J. de Almeida Filho, emphasized: 'Brazil is of the opinion that people in conflict areas cannot freely express their opinions through referendums. The results of the vote are not a valid and cannot be considered legitimate. We voted in favour also because we adhere to the principle of Ukraine's territorial integrity, as well as of any other Member State. International law and UN Charter must be respected and honoured.' He also expressed concern about '...all implicit or explicit threats related to the use of nuclear weapons in connection with the conflict. Any use of nuclear weapons is unacceptable and would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences'¹⁶.

At the same time, on 30 September 2022, Brazil, together with China and India, abstained from voting on the Security Council resolution condemning referenda in the Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions, despite Costa Filho's explicit statement that those were illegitimate. 'It is unreasonable to assume that populations in areas in conflict can freely express their will. Under given circumstances, the results of such referenda are invalid and do not represent the genuine will of the local population, and therefore cannot be perceived as legitimate. Brazil adheres to the principle of territorial integrity of sovereign states'¹⁷. At the time, he argued that 'the scope and language of the text, <...> do not contribute

¹⁴ Máximo W. Brasil defende a permanência da Rússia no G20, diz Carlos França. Agência Brasil. 18.04.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/internacional/noticia/2022-04/brasil-defende-permanencia-da-russia-no-g20-diz-carlos-franca> (Accessed: 19.11.2024).

¹⁵ Máximo W. Ministro diz ser contra sanções e pede permanência da Rússia no FMI. Agência Brasil. 19.04.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/economia/noticia/2022-04/ministro-diz-ser-contra-sancoes-e-pede-permanencia-da-russia-no-fmi> (Accessed: 19.11.2024).

¹⁶ General Assembly 14th plenary meeting. United Nations Digital Library. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/626/23/pdf/n2262623.pdf> (Accessed: 19.11.2024).

¹⁷ See also the speech of a Brazilian representative at the UNSC meeting on 27 September 2022 Security Council Meeting 9138. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n22/602/61/pdf/n2260261.pdf> Accessed 19.11.2024.

to resolving the conflict <...> or reaching immediate objectives of de-escalating tensions, ceasefire agreement and launching peace negotiations’¹⁸. On 14 November and 15 December 2022, Brazil, together with India and South Africa, abstained from voting on the GA resolutions on the ‘Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine’ and the ‘Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine’ (China voted against).

The 2023 presidential election in Brazil resulted in a victory for centre-left Lula da Silva. In diplomatic terms, his administration sought to maintain strict equidistance from the parties to the conflict and, above all, solidarity with other BRICS countries, particularly India and South Africa. At the first meeting of the UN Security Council on Ukraine in 2023, Costa Filho stressed — “Brazil reiterates its commitment to sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and to a political settlement of the conflict, taking into account legitimate security concerns”¹⁹, referring to Russia’s interests. At the next meeting, on 6 February, having condemned “attacks on civilian targets in violation of international law and international humanitarian law” and the use of anti-personnel mines, he identified the root cause of the conflict. “The failure to build a solid European security architecture in the 1990s and 2000s proved to be a ticking time bomb whose consequences are now unfolding before our eyes”. The diplomat expressed regret that ‘public debate on the conflict in Ukraine mainly focuses on the supply of arms and ammunition’ and called for ‘a ceasefire without preconditions’²⁰, thus refusing to support Kyiv’s demand set out in V. Zelensky’s ‘Ukrainian peace formula’ for the withdrawal of Russian troops as a precondition for the start of negotiations. On 23 February 2023, Brazil voted in favour of the UNGA resolution on the ‘Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine’, while China, India and South Africa abstained. Meanwhile, Ambassador Costa Filho once again questioned a key provision of the ‘Ukrainian peace formula’: ‘Brazil regards the call for a cessation of hostilities in paragraph 5 as a call for both sides to cease

¹⁸ Security Council Meeting 9143. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n22/607/40/pdf/n2260740.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

¹⁹ Security Council Meeting 9243. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/014/82/pdf/n2301482.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

²⁰ Security Council Meeting 9254. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/034/36/pdf/n2303436.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

violence without preconditions’²¹. It should be noted that this was the last anti-Russian resolution adopted by the UN GA, UN Security Council and UNHRC, which Brazil voted in favour of. On 17 March, Almeida Filho, together with representatives of China, Ghana and the Russian Federation, supported the invitation to address the UNSC meeting of D. Morozova, ombudsman from Donetsk. In his speech, Filho implicitly condemned Western the stance: ‘Insisting on military solutions backed by unilateral sanctions will not help end this conflict’. He also added that ‘it is necessary to recognize security concerns of the affected parties and to respond to them in a constructive and pragmatic manner’²², i.e. he reiterated the idea that Russia’s security interests should also be taken into account when concluding a peace agreement. In other words, he reiterated the idea that the security interests of the Russian Federation should also be taken into account when concluding a peace agreement. Together with India and South Africa, Brazil abstained from voting on GA resolutions on the ‘Human rights situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol’ on 19 December 2023 and on the ‘Technical and physical safety of nuclear facilities in Ukraine, including the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant’ on 11 July 2024, as well as on the HRC resolution on the ‘Situation of Human Rights in Ukraine Stemming from the Russian Aggression’ on 9 April 2024²³.

Brazilian diplomats persisted in their reluctance to offer direct criticism of Russian actions in Ukraine. Thus, at the meeting of 15 May 2023, Brazil’s representative expressed regret that ‘the pursuit of a military solution to the conflict continues to result in the loss of many human lives in, inter alia, air strikes earlier this month against Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities’, but again did not indicate who was responsible for these strikes. The representative called on ‘*all parties* to respect the norms of international humanitarian law (emphasis added — I.K.)’²⁴... The parties should refrain from attacking critical civilian

²¹ General Assembly 19th plenary meeting. United Nations Digital Library. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/058/27/pdf/n2305827.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

²² Security Council Meeting 9286. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/078/81/pdf/n2307881.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

²³ China voted against the resolutions on 19 December 2023 and 9 April 2024 (as well as other anti-Russian HRC resolutions on 4 April 2023 and 14 July 2023) and abstained from voting on the resolution of 11 July 2024.

²⁴ Security Council Meeting 9321. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/135/50/pdf/n2313550.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

infrastructure'. He also deplored 'attempts to force others to choose one side or the other', saying that: '...Brazil supports territorial integrity of Ukraine. However, this principled position should not prevent the Council from working towards a peaceful solution to the conflict ... the parties to the conflict and other Member States should be willing to understand the demands and concerns of both sides'.

On 28 June 2023, the Lula da Silva administration appointed Sérgio França Danese, a former Brazilian ambassador to Peru, as Brazil's new representative to the UN. This appointment did not result in a shift in Brazil's diplomatic position. While Brazilian diplomats continued to condemn attacks on residential areas and civilian objects, they refrained from making specific accusations, emphasizing that 'a mere condemnation of illegal acts during the war will not bring the world any closer to a peaceful resolution of the conflict'. Furthermore, they condemned 'massive deliveries of lethal weapons to the area of hostilities', which 'could further undermine the prospects for a peaceful outcome'²⁵. In a bid to maintain a balanced and nuanced approach, Brazilian representatives sought to ensure an equitable distribution of responsibility. They emphasized the necessity for both parties to de-escalate hostilities, prioritizing the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law. <Brazil> strongly appeals to all the parties to immediately start pragmatic negotiations'²⁶. Brazilian diplomats further argued for the conclusion of a comprehensive peace agreement that would respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as legitimate security interests of all the parties involved²⁷. Furthermore, they repeatedly emphasized the repercussions of the conflict on the economies of developing countries and their food and energy security, citing escalating prices of food, fertilizers and energy as a key concern.

In 2023, there was only one instance of a direct condemnation of Russia's actions by Brazil. This was the words of Costa Filho at the meeting of 24 February 2023, when he said, 'We condemn Russia's invasion and violation of the territorial integrity of a sovereign state, Ukraine'²⁸. On 8 September 2023, Brazil also

²⁵ Security Council Meeting 9380. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/208/73/pdf/n2320873.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

²⁶ Security Council Meeting 9494. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/386/25/pdf/n2338625.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

²⁷ Security Council Meeting 9380. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/208/73/pdf/n2320873.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

²⁸ Security Council Meeting 9269. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/058/65/pdf/n2305865.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

expressed ‘concern over regional elections in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporozhye’. ‘Such actions, França Danese emphasized, ‘exacerbate tensions and further undermine the prospects of ending the conflict and achieving lasting peace’²⁹. However, on that occasion too, Russia was not directly mentioned.

It can thus be concluded that the Brazilian position towards the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict of 2022–2024 evolved from a moderately critical stance to a more balanced perspective. On the one hand, Brazil repeatedly expressed support for the principle of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, and condemned actions that formally violate Ukraine’s sovereignty (referendums, elections) and strikes on civilian objects and infrastructure. On the other hand, it avoided direct accusations of Russia in war crimes, and advocated the idea of ‘double responsibility’, calling on ‘both sides’ to respect international law and protect civilians. Brazil also insisted on the need, in the event of a peaceful settlement, to take into account security interests not only of Ukraine but also of Russia, and to cease hostilities without a precondition of prior withdrawal of Russian troops from the territories they occupied after the start of the conflict. The underlying reasons for this stance require further examination.

Factors behind Brazil’s stance

Following the start of SMO, right-wing populist J. Bolsonaro’s administration faced the need to make very difficult choices. A mere six days prior, Brazil’s president had undertaken an official visit to Moscow³⁰ despite intense diplomatic pressure from the US. American diplomats sought to convince Bolsonaro that in the context of an imminent armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, his visit would bolster Putin’s confidence and legitimacy, thereby hindering efforts to isolate Russia internationally. It is logical to infer that Bolsonaro’s decision to disregard these warnings stemmed from deteriorating relations between the United States and Brazil following Trump’s defeat in the 2020 presidential election and Bolsonaro’s aspiration to enhance his declining popularity by acting as a global leader³¹. In an effort to mitigate any potential criticism of the visit, which could be perceived as a miscalculation in foreign policy or as an act of support for Russia, the president sought to present himself

²⁹ Security Council Meeting 9414. United Nations. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/pro/n23/263/85/pdf/n2326385.pdf> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

³⁰ For detail, see [6].

³¹ On Bolsonaro's foreign policy, see [8].

as both a public official concerned with Brazil's economic interests, particularly the issue of fertilizer imports, and as a peacemaker. Prior to his departure, Bolsonaro stated that he was 'asking God to establish world peace for the benefit of all'³² [13]. On the eve of the visit, Russia announced a partial withdrawal of its military from the Ukrainian border, a move interpreted by some observers as a gesture towards the Brazilian leader. Social media even started featuring a hashtag #BolsonaroAvoidedAWar. Bolsonaro was clearly pleased with his meeting with Russian president: 'I spent two hours at one and a half metre distance from Vladimir Putin, in a very friendly conversation ... which indicates his good attitude towards Brazil'³³. He described Putin as 'Brazil's great ally' in the issue of Brazilian sovereignty over the Amazon Basin³⁴ and even told him that 'Brazil is in solidarity with Russia'³⁵, albeit not specifying in what way. Following the White House statement on 18 February 2024 that Brazil's position on Russia-Ukraine crisis seemed contrary to that of most countries in the world, the Ministry of External Relations (Itamaraty) tried to soften the impression of Bolsonaro's visit to Moscow, pointing out that this position 'is clear, public and has been repeatedly conveyed to the authorities of friendly countries and expressed in the framework of the UN Security Council'³⁶, a statement perceived by some Brazilian politicians as a certain distancing of Itamaraty from Planalto³⁷.

Given his visit to Moscow, the launch of the special military operation put Bolsonaro in a somewhat difficult position. He even requested that his ministers refrain from making public statements on the subject and only allowed the

³² Cazarré M. Presidente Jair Bolsonaro embarca nesta segunda-feira para a Rússia. Agência Brasil. 14.02.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2022-02/presidente-jair-bolsonaro-embarca-nesta-segunda-feira-para-a-russia> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

³³ Lisboa V. Presidente agradece a Putin apoio à soberania brasileira na Amazônia. Agência Brasil. 18.02.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2022-02/presidente-agradeceu-putin-apoio-soberania-brasileira-na-amazonia> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

³⁴ Lisboa V. Presidente agradece a Putin apoio à soberania brasileira na Amazônia. Agência Brasil. 18.02.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2022-02/presidente-agradeceu-putin-apoio-soberania-brasileira-na-amazonia> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

³⁵ Gielow I. Somos solidários à Rússia, diz Bolsonaro em encontro com Putin. Folha de S.Paulo. 16.02.2022. URL: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2022/02/somos-solidarios-a-russia-diz-bolsonaro-em-encontro-com-putin.shtml> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

³⁶ Vilela PR. Itamaraty rebate declarações de porta-voz da Casa Branca. Agência Brasil. 19.02.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/internacional/noticia/2022-02/itamaraty-rebate-declaracoes-de-porta-voz-da-casa-branca> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

³⁷ Planalto Palace is the official residence of the President of Brazil; the term 'Planalto' is used as a metonym for presidential power.

Foreign Ministry to issue a press release early 24 February stating that Brazil was ‘watching with serious concern’ the start of Russian military operations against targets in Ukraine and was ‘calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the start of negotiations’³⁸. On 26 February, Bolsonaro himself openly expressed his position: Brazil, he said, ‘supports sovereignty, self-determination and territorial integrity of other states’³⁹. At a press conference the following day Bolsonaro added that he did not support ‘any sanctions or condemnation of President Putin ... Brazil’s position must be very cautious’⁴⁰. On 3 March, Bolsonaro said that Brazil would take a balanced stance on the conflict⁴¹. These were in stark contrast to strong condemnation of Russia’s actions in the Parliament by a wide range of political parties — Workers’ Party, ‘Podemos’, ‘Citizenship’, Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), Social Democratic Party, Progressives⁴². A number of deputies called upon the government to relinquish its stance of neutrality and align with Ukraine. Senator Leila Barros (Citizenship) posited that a refusal to condemn Russia’s actions would be ‘another disaster for Brazilian diplomacy, distancing it from the international community’⁴³. Senator Renan Calheiros (MDB) delivered a scathing critique against President Bolsonaro, stating: ‘During a dubious and futile visit to Russia, the president made a controversial announcement that he had averted World War III in Moscow... Bolsonaro’s ignorance put Brazil at the centre of the biggest global crisis since World War II. Its repercussions could be far-reaching and

³⁸ Cazarré M. Invasão russa: Itamaraty apela para a suspensão imediata do conflito. Agência Brasil. 24.02.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/internacional/noticia/2022-02/invasao-russa-itamaraty-apela-para-suspensao-imediata-do-conflito> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

³⁹ Brasil defende integridade territorial das nações, diz presidente. Agência Bra-sil. 26.02.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2022-02/brasil-defende-integridade-territorial-das-nacoes-diz-presidente> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴⁰ Presidente: posição do Brasil sobre conflito na Ucrânia é de cautela. Agência Brasil. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2022-02/presidente-posicao-do-brasil-sobre-conflito-na-ucrania-e-de-cautela> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴¹ Vilela PR. Ucrânia: Brasil vai manter posição de equilíbrio, diz Bolsonaro. Agência Brasil. 3.03.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/internacional/noticia/2022-03/ucrania-brasil-vai-manter-posicao-de-equilibrio-diz-presidente> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴² Senadores lamentam ataque da Rússia à Ucrânia. Agência Senado. 24.02.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/02/24/senadores-lamentam-ataque-da-russia-a-ucrania> (accessed: 19.11.2024). Senadores pedem apoio do governo a brasileiros na Ucrânia. Agência Senado. 25.02.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/02/25/senadores-pedem-apoio-do-governo-a-brasileiros-na-ucrania> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴³ Senadores pedem apoio do governo a brasileiros na Ucrânia. Agência Senado. 25.02.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/02/25/senadores-pedem-apoio-do-governo-a-brasileiros-na-ucrania> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

detrimental.’⁴⁴ On 24 February 2022, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the Chamber of Deputies National Defence Committee issued respective statements strongly condemning Russia’s ‘military actions in Ukraine’/‘attacks on Ukrainian territory’ as a violation of international law⁴⁵. However, the statement of Federal Senate Chairman Rodrigo Pacheco was made in very cautious terms: he only called for a negotiated settlement of the conflict and refrained from accusations against one side or the other⁴⁶. However, as early as 8 March 2022, the Senate adopted a resolution expressing solidarity with Ukraine and its people⁴⁷. Furthermore, in June 2022, deputy A. Gaspar of Brazilian Union condemned Planalto’s position on the matter, as, in his words, it ‘caused mistrust on the part of <Brazil’s> traditional allies, who believed that Brazil should have taken a tougher stance on who attacked and who was attacked’⁴⁸. 17 April 2023 Liberal Senator R. Marinho condemned Bolsonaro’s statement that Kiev, as well as Moscow, was to blame for the conflict in Ukraine, and his call for Western countries to refrain from selling arms to Ukraine⁴⁹. On 28 February 2024, Senator S. Moro (Brazilian Union) criticized the government for its ‘absolute silence’ on human rights violations in Russia⁵⁰. At the same time, besides putting pressure on Planalto, the Congress tried to pursue its

⁴⁴ Senadores lamentam ataque da Rússia à Ucrânia. Agência Senado. 24.02.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/02/24/senadores-lamentam-ataque-da-russia-a-ucrania> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴⁵ Conflito entre Rússia e Ucrânia. Nota Oficial da Presidência da CREDN. Comissão de Relações Exteriores e de Defesa Nacional. 24.02.2022. URL: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/atividade-legislativa/comissoes/comissoes-permanentes/credn/noticias/crise-entre-russia-e-ucrania-2013-nota-oficial-da-presidencia-da-credn> (accessed: 19.11.2024). Comissão de Relações Exteriores condena conflito na Ucrânia. Agência Senado. 24.02.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/02/24/comissao-de-relacoes-exteriores-condena-conflito-na-ucrania> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴⁶ Pacheco expressa preocupação diante de conflito entre Rússia e Ucrânia. Agência Senado. 24.02.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/02/24/pacheco-expressa-preocupacao-diante-de-conflito-entre-russia-e-ucrania> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴⁷ Senado aprova voto de solidariedade à Ucrânia. Agência Senado. 08.03.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/03/08/senado-aprova-voto-de-solidariedade-a-ucrania> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴⁸ Requerimento de 2024 do Senhor Alfredo Gaspar. Junho de 2024. URL: https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/prop_mostrarintegra?codteor=2441041&filename=REQ%2047/2024%20CREDN (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁴⁹ Rogerio Marinho critica posicionamento de Lula em viagem à China. Agência Senado. 17.04.2023. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2023/04/17/rogerio-marinho-critica-posicionamento-de-lula-em-viagem-a-china> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁵⁰ Moro critica silêncio do governo federal em relação à Rússia. Agência Senado. 28.02.2024. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2024/02/28/moro-critica-silencio-do-governo-federal-em-relacao-a-russia> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

own diplomacy towards Russia and Ukraine. On 24 March 2022, the Brazilian Committee on Foreign Relations and National Defence (CREDN, in Portuguese) made a decision to invite Russian and Ukrainian ambassadors A. Labetsky and A. Tkach⁵¹ to its meeting. A number of senators even called for V. Zelensky and Ukrainian Foreign Minister D. Kuleba to be invited to Brazil with the former being granted the opportunity to deliver a speech before CREDN⁵². In August 2024, a parliamentary group embarked on a humanitarian mission to Kyiv⁵³.

Of course, this is not to say that Congress adopted an unequivocally pro-Ukrainian stance. Thus, at a meeting with a Ukrainian ambassador on 6 April 2022 at CREDN, a number of senators criticized NATO policy of eastward expansion. Commission Chairwoman C. Abreu expressed regrets that Ukraine was being used as ‘cannon fodder’ in this geopolitical conflict: ‘This is a siege. NATO advances by prodding jaguars with a short stick. Is this the pursuit of peace? ... There are no innocents in this story.’ Progressive E. Amin said, ‘NATO is no defence organization. It is <created> to attack, threaten and wage war. It uses other countries. Its basis is arms production. The more NATO, the less UNO’⁵⁴.

Most pro-Ukrainian members of the Chamber of Deputies united in a Brazil-Ukraine parliamentary group (11 members), established back in 1996 and headed by F. Mendonça Junior (Democratic Workers’ Party). In addition to this, on 27 April 2023, another group of eight members was established at the Senate headed by F. Arns (Brazilian Socialist Party)⁵⁵. In fact, the number of deputies sympathetic towards Ukraine was much higher, as evidenced, in particular, by voting in the Chamber of Deputies on 14 September 2022 on Bill No. 423 ‘On the recognition of extermination of Ukrainians by famine (Holodomor) as genocide and the establishment of the 4th Saturday in November as Holodomor Remembrance Day’. Senator F. Arns called the voting ‘a gesture of solidarity with the nation

⁵¹ Diplomata da Ucrânia falará à Comissão de Relações Exteriores na quarta. Agência Senado. 01.04.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/04/01/representante-da-ucrania-falara-a-comissao-de-relacoes-exteriores-na-quarta> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁵² E.g. Girão pede que Senado ouça Zelensky: «governo ignora a Ucrânia». Agência Senado. 6.03.2024. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2024/03/06/girao-pede-que-senado-ouca-zelensky-governo-ignora-a-ucrania> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁵³ Report on the trip. Relatório de Viagem em Missão Oficial Internacional. 13.08.2024. URL: https://www.camara.leg.br/missao-oficial/missao_oficial_Relatorio?codViagem=125566&ponto=812194 (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁵⁴ Senadores afirmam que Ucrânia paga o preço por expansionismo da Otan. Agência Senado. 06.04.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/04/06/senadores-afirmam-que-ucrania-paga-o-preco-por-expansionismo-da-otan> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁵⁵ Resolução nº 6, de 2023. Institui o Grupo Parlamentar Brasil-Ucrânia. 27.04.2023. URL: <https://legis.senado.leg.br/norma/37000329/publicacao/37001316> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

now experiencing brutal aggression'⁵⁶. The vote was passed by a margin of 308 to 18⁵⁷. Pro-Ukrainian part of the parliament was constantly putting pressure on the government, which came in various forms — from summoning ministers to congressional committees to public hearings and to written requests of deputies to various ministries. Thus, on 1 March 2023, six deputies demanded that Foreign Minister M. Vieira explain why Brazil's representative at the UN Security Council meeting on 24 January 2023 refused to uphold Ukraine's request to honour with silence the 'victims of Russian aggression' (vítimas da agressão russa). In their appeal, the following questions were put forward: 1) Did this refusal result from an instruction from the Brazilian Ministry of External Relations? 2) Did the Ministry in fact instruct the Brazilian delegation to follow the position of the Chinese delegation on this matter? 3) Does the Ministry concur with the assertion that Russia is 'engaged in aggression towards Ukraine?' 4) Does the Ministry subscribe to the notion that Russia's aggression towards Ukraine 'is a consequence of any Ukrainian aggression towards Russia'? 5) Does the Ministry acknowledge that the conduct of the Brazilian delegation is in direct contravention of the principles enshrined in Brazil's Constitution?⁵⁸

The reaction of Congress to the government's decision not to sell 450 armoured Guarani ambulances at the request of Ukraine on 27 April 2023 was even more negative. The refusal was initiated by Itamaraty, which explained their decision by suggesting that the agreement 'would jeopardize Brazil's position of neutrality'⁵⁹ in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. On 2 August 2023 and 23 April 2024, the Financial Supervision and Control Commission and the CREDN made enquiries to the Foreign Ministry on this matter⁶⁰. The refusal to sell ambulances to Ukraine received widespread coverage in the Brazilian press and led to an awkward moment during a joint news conference of Lula da Silva and Dutch Prime Minister M. Rutte

⁵⁶ Aprovado reconhecimento do Holodomor como genocídio contra ucranianos. Agência Senado. 26.04.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/04/26/aprovado-reconhecimento-do-holodomor-como-genocidio-contra-ucranianos> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁵⁷ Projeto de Lei nº 423, de 2022. URL: <https://www25.senado.leg.br/web/atividade/materias/-/materia/151969> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁵⁸ Requerimento de Informação do Sr. Marcel van Hattem e outros. 1.03.2023. URL: https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/prop_mostrarintegra?codteor=2241236 (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁵⁹ Bastos P.R. Governo nega exportação do Guarani ambulância para a Ucrânia. Tecnologia e Defesa. 20.06.2023. URL: <https://tecnodefesa.com.br/governo-nega-exportacao-do-guarani-ambulancia-para-a-ucrania/> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶⁰ Requerimento de Informação do Sr. Marcel van Hattem e outros. 3.07.2023. URL: https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/prop_mostrarintegra?codteor=2301058&filename=RIC%201893/2023 (accessed: 19.11.2024).

on 9 May 2023, when the Brazilian president in response to a question from journalist P.R. Vilela described the refusal as fake news⁶¹.

Nevertheless, pressure from the Congress did not make the government change its position. On 12 March 2024, at a meeting of the Chamber of Deputies with CREDN chairman L. Redeker (Brazilian Social Democratic Party), Ukrainian ambassador A. Melnyk expressed concern that there had been no visits from Brazilian government officials to Ukraine in the last two years, adding: ‘There are a lot of declarations and gestures, but no real action’. Redeker concurred, suggesting that Brazil should consider taking ‘further actions beyond formal declarations’⁶². For its part, the Bolsonaro administration, like the Lula da Silva administration, took essentially the same stance in its discussions with MPs: Brazil formally condemned Russia’s actions, so there is no basis for parliamentary criticism. In a public hearing at the Senate CREDN on 6 April 2022, C. França challenged the assertion that Brazil had adopted a ‘dubious position’ (*posição dúbia*) on the SMO, emphasizing that aggression was unacceptable and that Russia had crossed a red line by initiating armed conflict and invasion into other people’s territory. França was emphatic in Brazil’s stance, stating that Brazil’s position was unequivocal in its condemnation of the invasion⁶³. “From a geopolitical perspective, Brazil condemns the invasion. We are the only BRICS country that condemns the invasion,” stated P. Guedes on 19 April 2022⁶⁴. In the above-mentioned news conference on 9 May 2023, Lula da Silva reiterated this stance, stating: “It is widely recognized that Brazil has condemned Russia’s territorial occupation of Ukraine⁶⁵.”

⁶¹ Pronunciamentos do presidente da República, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, e do primeiro-ministro da Holanda, Mark Rutte, após encontro no Palácio do Planalto. Gov.br. 10.05.2023. URL: <https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/discursos-e-pronunciamentos/2023/pronunciamentos-do-presidente-da-republica-luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva-e-do-primeiro-ministro-da-holanda-mark-rutte-apos-encontro-no-palacio-do-planalto> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶² Ucrânia conta com o Brasil na construção de um acordo de paz. Comissão de Relações Exteriores e de Defesa Nacional. 12.03.2024. URL: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/atividade-legislativa/comissoes/comissoes-permanentes/credn/noticias/ucrania-counta-com-o-brasil-na-construcao-de-um-acordo-de-paz> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶³ Melo K. Ministro diz que agressão da Rússia à Ucrânia é inadmissível. Agência Brasil. 6.04.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2022-04/ministro-diz-que-agressao-da-russia-ucrania-e-inadmissivel> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶⁴ Máximo W. Ministro diz ser contra sanções e pede permanência da Rússia no FMI. Agência Brasil. 19.04.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/economia/noticia/2022-04/ministro-diz-ser-contrasancoes-e-pede-permanencia-da-russia-no-fmi> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶⁵ Pronunciamentos do presidente da República, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, e do primeiro-ministro da Holanda, Mark Rutte, após encontro no Palácio do Planalto. Gov.br. 10.05.2023. URL: <https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/discursos-e-pronunciamentos/2023/pronunciamentos-do-presidente-da-republica-luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva-e-do-primeiro-ministro-da-holanda-mark-rutte-apos-encontro-no-palacio-do-planalto> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

Such a cautious approach from the Brazilian government — whether presided over by the right-wing populist Bolsonaro or the center-left Lula da Silva — may seem surprising, given the pressure from the Congress, a large Ukrainian community (600,000 people) living mainly in the states of Paraná and São Paulo⁶⁶, and close trade and economic ties with the United States and other Western countries. For example, in 2022, Brazilian exports to the US were 19 times as much as those to the Russian Federation, while Brazilian imports from the US were 6.5 times as much as those from Russia. However, Brazil's position was not so much conditioned by its 'traditional neutrality', but by quite pragmatic material considerations. On 9 June 2022 in Los Angeles, at a meeting with J. Biden as part of the 9th Summit of the Americas, Bolsonaro admitted: 'We regret the conflict, but I have a country that needs governing. And because of our dependence <on Russia> we always need to be careful'⁶⁷. At a Senate CREDN hearing on 6 April, C. França frankly stated that the Brazilian government's principal concern over the armed conflict in Ukraine was the supply of fertilizers. 'They are essential for agriculture⁶⁸,' he emphasized. Fertilizers, especially nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, are widely used in the agricultural sector in Brazil, which consumes 8 % of the world's total fertilizer production (4th in the world), importing 85 %, mainly from Russia. Fertilizers accounted for the bulk of Russian imports to Brazil (58.14 % in 2014, 61.97 % in 2021 and 71.42 % in 2022) with Russia being its major supplier (20.45 % in 2014, 23.29 % in 2021 and 22.63 % in 2022)⁶⁹. This dependence is the reason why the Brazilian government was so negative towards Western sanctions against Russia, as they may hinder regular deliveries of Russian fertilizers to Brazil.

Armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine prompted a spike in international fertilizer prices, already on the rise since July 2020, which peaked in April 2022, posing a major risk to Brazilian agricultural

⁶⁶ Senado adia votação de projeto que reconhece Holodomor como genocídio. Agência Senado. 23.03.2022. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/03/23/senado-adia-votacao-de-projeto-que-reconhece-holodomor-como-genocidio> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶⁷ Vilela PR. Presidentes Bolsonaro e Biden fazem reunião bilateral nos EUA. Agência Brasil. 9.06.2022. Available from: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2022-06/presidentes-bolsonaro-e-biden-fazem-reuniao-bilateral-nos-eua> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶⁸ Melo K. Ministro diz que agressão da Rússia à Ucrânia é inadmissível. Agência Brasil. 6.04.2022. URL: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2022-04/ministro-diz-que-agressao-da-russia-ucrania-e-inadmissivel> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁶⁹ Data retrieved from <https://www.trademapp.org/>

businesses⁷⁰. However, soon afterwards they started a gradual decline. Although they never returned to the level of summer 2020, by the end of 2023 they stabilized at around the level of May 2021⁷¹. In this situation, plans to sell a nitrogen fertilizer plant in Tres Lagoas (Mato Grosso do Sul), the largest in Latin America, to the Russian company Acron met a strong resistance from a number of senators. Senator S. Tebet (MDB) called the plans ‘a crime against the country’⁷². On 28 April 2022, Petrobras announced that the deal had been scrapped⁷³. In March 2022, the Bolsonaro administration launched the National Fertilizer Plan, aimed to reduce by 2050 its dependence on fertilizer imports⁷⁴, described in December 2023 by a progressivist senator L. Oliveira as a ‘strategic geopolitical mistake’⁷⁵. On 6 April 2022, C. França pledged that Brazil would try to redirect fertilizer imports from Russia to Iran⁷⁶ [40].

Initially, events in Ukraine also posed a threat to Brazil due to the rise in global prices for the energy and wheat it imports. Wheat prices skyrocketed with the start of the SMO, while crude oil prices had been rising since as early as November 2021, but also soared starting late February 2022. However, wheat prices began to go down in May 2022 with crude oil prices starting to decrease in June, thus the problem of supplying Brazil with those commodities lost its former urgency. Moreover, following the start of the SMO, especially from 2023 onwards, Brazil started benefiting from Western attempts to restrict Russian oil exports by increasing its purchases: while in 2017–2020 the share

⁷⁰ Comissão debate impactos e benefícios da produção de fertilizantes nitrogenados. Agência Câmara de Notícias. 27.05.2024. URL: <https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/1065581-comissao-debate-impactos-e-beneficios-da-producao-de-fertilizantes-nitrogenados/> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

⁷¹ Fertilizers Price Index (I:FPINH3XX). URL: https://ycharts.com/indicators/fertilizers_index_world_bank (accessed: 19.11.2024).

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⁷⁵ Laércio explica importância do Plano Nacional de Fertilizantes. Agência Senado. 5.12.2023. URL: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2023/12/05/laercio-explica-importancia-do-plano-nacional-de-fertilizantes> (accessed: 19.11.2024).

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of Brazil's purchases of Russian oil as part of its imports from Russia fell from 12.62 % to 1.95 %, in 2021–2023 it increased from 7.59 % to 52.56 %; resulting in oil becoming the principal commodity of Russian imports in 2023. While in 2022 Russia accounted for 4.7 % of Brazil's total oil imports, in 2023 it would account for 30.4 %⁷⁷.

Conclusion

The analysis conducted indicates that Brazil's diplomatic response to the SMO exhibited variations across both executive and legislative branches of government. While the position of Congress and, in particular, oppositional parties can be broadly regarded as pro-Ukrainian, the stance adopted by the president and his government, irrespective of their political and ideological inclinations, was seemingly balanced and neutral. However, in practice, it was even somewhat pro-Russian, albeit the least pro-Russian among all BRICS states. In our opinion, Brazil's membership in BRICS did not become a determining factor in its policy towards Russia and Ukraine in 2022–2024, but rather it was Brazil's economic interests, as the country was unable to abandon mutually beneficial relations with Russia without damaging its economy, in contrast to most European states. It is these factors — Brazil's desire to diplomatically demonstrate neutrality by 'having a foot in both camps', Congressional political pressure on Planalto, coupled with cold calculation and desire to maximize on its own national interests — that Russia should take into account when shaping its foreign policy towards Brazil in the context of rising geopolitical confrontation. Brazil's foreign policy is expected to remain pragmatic and cautious, a strategy that would enable the nation to circumvent the necessity of making substantial commitments and adopting a definitive stance on international conflicts outside Latin America. It is important to acknowledge that Brazil's foreign policy is an extension of that at home.

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