COGNITIVE DYNAMICS IN FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING: AN ANALYSIS OF IMAGE CONSTRUCTION IN THE CASE OF THE "INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY" (1961–1964)

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Abstract

The article examines the role of cognitive elements—particularly images—in the formulation and implementation of Brazil's so-called Independent Foreign Policy (PEI/1961-1964). It argues that PEI constituted a landmark in Brazil's strategy of international insertion, structured around a set of beliefs, values, and images shared by policymakers. The analysis shows that these cognitive elements guided—and, in some cases, conditioned—the decision-making process and the formation of national interests within a context of structural change in the international system.

Keywords: Independent Foreign Policy. Cognitive approach. Images.

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DINÂMICAS COGNITIVAS DO PROCESSO DECISÓRIO EM POLÍTICA EXTERNA: UMA ANÁLISE DA CONSTRUÇÃO DE IMAGENS NA "POLÍTICA EXTERNA INDEPENDENTE" (1961-1964)

Resumo

O artigo analisa o papel dos elementos cognitivos, em particular das imagens, na formulação e implementação da Política Externa Independente (PEI/1961-1964). Argumenta-se que a PEI constituiu um marco na estratégia de inserção internacional do Brasil, sendo estruturada a partir de um conjunto de crenças, valores e imagens compartilhados pelos tomadores de decisão. O estudo demonstra que tais elementos cognitivos orientaram – e, em certa medida, condicionaram – o processo decisório e a própria construção dos interesses nacionais em um contexto de transformações estruturais do sistema internacional.

Palavras-chave: Política Externa Independente. Abordagem cognitiva. Imagens.

DINÁMICAS COGNITIVAS DEL PROCESO DE TOMA DE DECISIONES EN POLÍTICA EXTERIOR: UN ANÁLISIS DE LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE IMÁGENES EN LA "POLÍTICA EXTERIOR INDEPENDIENTE" (1961-1964)

Resumen

El artículo analiza el papel de los elementos cognitivos, en particular de las imágenes, en la formulación y aplicación de la Política Exterior Independiente (PEI/1961-1964). Se sostiene que la PEI constituyó un hito en la estrategia de integración internacional de Brasil, y que se estructuró a partir de un conjunto de creencias, valores e imágenes compartidos por los responsables de la toma de decisiones. El estudio demuestra que dichos elementos cognitivos orientaron —y, en cierta medida, condicionaron— el proceso de toma de decisiones y la propia construcción de los intereses nacionales en un contexto de transformaciones estructurales del sistema internacional.

Palabras clave: Política Exterior Independiente. Enfoque cognitivo. Imágenes.

1. Introduction

In broad terms, foreign policy may be defined as "the set of decisions or rules that guide the actions of an independent political authority within the international environment" (Morin and Paquin 2018, 3). The undeniable complexity and breadth of the scope of action of these referential units led Russell (1990, 255) to propose a more comprehensive definition: a specific domain of governmental political action encompassing three major dimensions—political-diplomatic, military-strategic, and economic—which projects itself externally before a myriad of governmental and non-governmental actors and institutions. Foreign policy thus constitutes a set of processes shaped by the articulation between national objectives and external constraints, in which diplomatic action emerges as a fundamental instrument for affirming and defending the State's position vis-a-vis the other actors operating within this arena.

Examples of such variables include military and technological capabilities; geography; natural and human resources; the influence of interest groups and specialized domestic bureaucracies; processes of identity formation among states—or, in other words, the set of meanings that these actors attribute to themselves in relation to others within a given context—as well as the role of ideas and shared beliefs in legitimizing, constraining, enabling, and/or constituting the actions of decision-makers.

Consequently, from both a methodological and, by extension, an ontological perspective, as the study of foreign policy decision-making processes gains prominence, new approaches have emerged and reassess the importance of variables previously considered secondary, such as the domestic environment, cognitive limitations, and the role of bureaucracies and organizational cultures. As a result, the heterogeneous nature of decision-making processes has fostered the development of a profusion of theoretical approaches that offer competing and complementary analytical lenses for explaining the patterns through which foreign policy actions are formulated and implemented.

In this regard, beyond the classical rational actor model—wherein the State is viewed as a unitary and monolithic entity in the formulation and implementation of its foreign policy—scholars have access to a broad range of alternative explanatory theoretical frameworks. These include social and cognitive approaches grounded in beliefs, values, and cultural factors (Jervis 1976, Vertzberger 1990, Goldstein and Keohane 1993, Legro 1996, Rohrlich 1987, Herz 1994); organizational and bureaucratic-governmental models

(Snyder and Diesing 1977, Allison and Halperin 1972, Allison & Zelikow 1999, Cohen 2004); and interactive models based on two-level game theory (Putnam 1988, Milner 1997, Milner and Rosendorff 1997, Pahre 1997), among others.

Starting from the basic premise that a state's foreign policy is generally conditioned by a continuous interaction between internal and external factors, Lafer (1984) argues that it is necessary to examine two distinct yet complementary dimensions: the operating norms of the world order at a given historical moment and the specific modalities through which states are inserted into the dynamics of that system. Thus, considering the validity of this premise within the tradition of Brazilian foreign policy, it is assumed that the structure of the international system, particularly in terms of power distribution, as well as conjunctural variations, may constitute sources of constraint and/or pressure capable of directly influencing the selection of policy options that shape the country's external agenda (Oliveira 2005). This, in turn, invites reflection on the concerns raised herein when applied to the Brazilian case.

Therefore, to empirically examine why and how certain foreign policy decisions are made, as well as the explanatory limits of their conditioning factors, the period between 1961 and 1964 was selected as the temporal scope of analysis. From a foreign policy perspective, this period is both emblematic and highly consequential for the configuration of Brazil's international relations. Historiographical analysis reveals that, particularly from the 1960s onward, Brazilian foreign policy became closely linked to the national development project. This entailed a gradual shift away from the traditional East-West axis, marked by the ideological disputes of the Cold War, toward a more universalist conception of international relations. Within this framework, the emergence of the North-South axis gained prominence, particularly through its economic and social dimensions.

In this context, we observe a process of redefinition in Brazilian foreign policy rooted in principles anticipated by Juscelino Kubitschek as early as 1958, with the launch of the guidelines of Operation Pan-America (OPA). On the one hand, this initiative sought to mitigate Brazil's structural dependence on the United States; on the other, it aimed to diversify the country's international partnerships in pursuit of greater autonomy (Caldas, 1996).

Along the same trajectory, this shift laid the ground for a growing domestic awareness of Brazil's condition as an underdeveloped country, as well as the need to expand its international projection through foreign policy. Accordingly, the prevailing political imagination increasingly embraced the perception that maintaining a special relationship with the United States was

no longer a viable option (Silva 1995, Oliveira 2005).Against this backdrop, the foreign policy pursued during the brief presidency of Jânio Quadros (January 1961–August 1961),—the so-called Independent Foreign Policy (Política Externa Independente, PEI)[2]—which would continue until 1964 under the administration of João Goulart, constitutes the focus of this analysis. As Silva (1995, 26) argues, PEI represented "the first historical manifestation of a new foreign policy paradigm, the first to effectively establish itself as an alternative to the Americanism that had prevailed since the era of Rio Branco."

Within this scenario, where the destinies of international actors became increasingly intertwined in a context conducive to connections of the most varied kinds—both bilateral and multilateral—several paradigmatic questions emerge. Among them are: why and how are foreign policy decisions made? And, by extension, what are the explanatory limits of their domestic and external determinants? The answers to these questions depend upon several variables ranging from material and objective criteria to intangible elements located within the realm of ideas.

It is along these lines that this article seeks to contribute to the debate on the epistemology of foreign policy studies by investigating the role of images, drawing upon some of the conceptual lenses provided by the cognitive approach to decision-making analysis. Within the complex equation that shapes foreign policy, it is therefore important to ascertain whether descriptive ("how") and/or causal ("why") inferences can be identified that reveal the role of images—or subjective structures of knowledge, as defined by Boulding (1961)—as elements that organize preferences and guide behavior in the conduct of the object under examination: the Independent Foreign Policy.

However, given that this topic remains relatively underexplored within the foreign policy literature, the limitations associated with identifying robust correlations among the variables examined must be acknowledged. These include, as dependent variable, the role of images in the Independent Foreign Policy (PEI), and, as independent variable, the ontology of the international operational environment of the period, as will be discussed hereinafter.

To collect and systematize information, this study employs the desk research technique, broadly understood as a research procedure based on the identification, selection, and analysis of existing data, including official documents, historical archives, speeches, institutional reports, journals, and

2 A term coined by Francisco Clementino de San Tiago Dantas while he served as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs under the Jânio Quadros government (September 1961 – July 1962).

specialized databases. This methodological choice is particularly suitable for exploratory studies insofar as it enables the reconstruction of historical contexts, the identification of narratives, and, consequently, the mapping of interpretive patterns relevant to the research problem.

Finally, it should be emphasized that, given these obstacles—particularly those of a methodological nature—this research is essentially intended as a hypothesis-generating case study. Its primary objective is to formulate propositions that may subsequently be tested in future studies, thereby reducing selection biases and assessing the validity of the suggested generalizations.

To achieve this objective, the article is structured into three parts. First, it discusses the main characteristics of the cognitive approach based on a brief review of the relevant literature. Second, it examines the historical context in which the Independent Foreign Policy was established. Finally, it evaluates the contribution of the cognitive approach—more specifically, the role of images—in the decision-making processes associated with the Independent Foreign Policy.

2. Cognitive Approaches and Foreign Policy

The application of cognitive analysis as an explanatory factor in foreign policy decision-making processes developed primarily during the 1950s as a reaction against the homogenization of international actors, promoted by what was then considered the dominant theoretical mainstream in International Relations. This prevailing perspective essentially assumed: (1) the State as the only relevant actor in international relations; (2) state interests defined primarily in terms of power, with military dimension (high politics) taking precedence over all others (low politics); and (3) a clear separation between domestic and foreign policy.

As a response to the limitations of these assumptions, the cognitive approach emerged, seeking through a set of analytical propositions to investigate the subjective elements that influence actors' behavior in decision-making processes and to demonstrate that such actors cannot be treated as unitary or homogeneous entities. Early studies within the cognitive tradition concentrated on investigating psychological and cultural dimensions as guides to the behavioral actions of decision-makers in international politics (Herz 1994, 75-76).

It did not take long for these efforts to transform cognitive analysis—broadly grounded in the mental activities involved in processing information

from the surrounding environment—into a recognized subfield within foreign policy studies. Among the first generation of cognitive scholars, the works of Harold and Margaret Sprout (1957) and Richard Snyder *et al.* (1962) deserve particular attention. The Sprouts, for example, established an important distinction between the operational environment and the psychological environment. The operational environment refers to the actual setting in which domestic and international events occur while simultaneously shaping patterns of international conduct and policy. The psychological environment, by contrast, consists of images, ideas, values, beliefs, and perceptions. They argued that environmental factors influence foreign policy decisions only insofar as they are perceived and considered by decision-makers. As a result, the study of the psychological environment became increasingly important and eventually emerged as a legitimate object of inquiry within foreign policy analysis.

The conceptual framework developed by the Sprouts became a major theoretical milestone and continued to influence subsequent scholarship. Michael Brecher *et al.* (1969), for instance, revisited the concept of the psychological environment in their investigations of subjective variables, contributing to the understanding of decision-making processes and of the filtering power of images. According to their perspective, the operational environment—composed of external elements such as military and economic capabilities, political structures, interest groups, and competing elites—undoubtedly affects decision outcomes. However, its effects are mediated through the images and attitudes of those who make decisions. This reinforces the role of perceptions as a fundamental element in the analysis of a state's foreign policy.

In his study of Israeli foreign policy, Brecher (1972) significantly advanced the incorporation of cultural factors into the study of foreign policy decision-making. One of his key contributions was the distinction between what he termed the attitudinal prism—consisting of ideology, personality traits, and psychological predispositions of decision-making elites—and environmental images, understood as perceptions that constitute the most important input for the formation of a country's foreign policy.

The work of Snyder *et al.* (1962) stands as another foundational contribution to the field and is often regarded as the starting point for the systematic examination of cognitive variables in foreign policy analysis (Herz 1994, 76). In "Foreign Policy Decision-Making: An Approach to the Study of International Politics", Snyder and his collaborators demonstrated both the explanatory value of behavioral theories for studying decision-making processes and the relevance of policymakers' perceptions in shaping outcomes.

Although these works represent only a small sample of the extensive literature that has developed around the relationship between foreign policy and cognitive analysis, they clearly demonstrate how this emerging theoretical and conceptual framework challenged the dominant view that foreign policy decisions are merely the mechanical result of a rational, unitary State actor.

At the same time, cognitive analysis introduced new subjective dimensions into foreign policy studies by presenting an alternative perspective that views foreign policy as the result of the perceptions held by the groups and individuals who make decisions on behalf of the State (Oliveira 2005, 17).

An important example of this contribution is found in the work of Ole Holsti (1969). In "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study", Holsti discusses the role of national images as important organizers of perception and guides for behavior within a context shaped to a significant extent by subjective variables. For the study of images in decision-making processes, Herz (1994) also highlights the interpretative schemes proposed by Alfred Schutz (1967). In "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", Schutz portrays the decision-maker as an actor who brings to each encounter a stock of accumulated knowledge—formed through beliefs, values, and attitudes—that enables the classification of other actors according to interpretative schemes or cognitive road maps.

Finally, another important step toward understanding significant images in foreign policy analysis lies in recognizing the importance of international culture in the study of cognitive elements. According to this perspective, once international values become incorporated into the cognitive framework of national groups, they become part of their international culture. In this context, the content of images is both an integral component of and a major factor in defining that culture (Herz 1994, 84).

As studies examining the impact of subjective variables on foreign policy become increasingly sophisticated, it is evident that policymakers' perceptions precede decision-making processes and are linked to a set of beliefs, values, and images that actors carry with them, guiding the conduct of foreign policy.

In summary, the literature on cognitive analysis in international relations demonstrates that images, values, cognitive maps, and other elements emphasized by this theoretical approach contribute to the formation of belief systems that function as filters of reality. Decision-makers consequently select and organize information according to their goals and preferences within a complex, dynamic, and anarchic international system. That said, it is not difficult to understand why Renouvin and Duroselle (1967, 6) emphasized that studying international relations without considering factors such as the

personal conceptions of statesmen would mean neglecting what is sometimes an essential factor.

Thus, one of the core assumptions of cognitive analysis is that the images constructed by decision-makers regarding who they are—as well as the images they project onto other actors in the international arena—play an important role in shaping foreign policy decision-making processes. Once the potential influence of this approach is acknowledged, the central question is: to what extent does this influence occur, and under what circumstances? In seeking answers, the following sections examine the empirical validity of the cognitive approach, particularly regarding one of its constitutive elements—images—in the case of Brazil's Independent Foreign Policy (PEI).

3. The International Scenario of the 1960s and the Independent Foreign Policy

The international environment at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s was marked by intense tension. It was a period of uncertainty and instability, overshadowed by the threat of nuclear catastrophe. From the Cuban Revolution (1959) to the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961), tensions culminated in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, resulting from the Soviet decision to install nuclear missile launchers on the Caribbean island capable of reaching Washington, D.C. within fifteen minutes of launch (Brazil 1995, 137).

The Cold War thus inaugurated a new architecture of power, accurately defined by the concept of "balance of terror", expressed in its most pessimistic form through the theory of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). The logic of the international system, characterized by the bipolar distribution of global power, gave rise to an ideological conflict which, in Magnoli's words (1996, 47), "opposed a liberal democracy associated with a capitalist market economy, represented by the United States, to a one-party political system associated with a centrally planned and state-controlled economy, represented by the Soviet Union."

Simultaneously, international relations underwent profound structural transformations due to the emergence of new actors on the world stage. These developments resulted from the decolonization processes in Asia and Africa, which led to the creation of dozens of newly independent States.[3]

3 Beginning in 1946 with the independence of the Philippines, the post-World War II decolonization process reached its peak with the liberation of the Portuguese colonies in Africa, which was completed in the mid-

Although political independence had been achieved, these countries remained economically vulnerable and dependent.

Grouped under the designation of the Third World,[4] these new nations, together with those of Latin America, became associated with the challenge of maintaining economic autonomy while remaining deeply dependent on either the capitalist industrialized countries of the First World or the socialist economies of the Second World.

The reactions to these paradigm shifts quickly emerged within Brazil's strategic environment. In Latin America, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC/CEPAL), Dependency Theory was formulated by scholars such as Celso Furtado, Hélio Jaguaribe, Osvaldo Sunkel, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Enzo Faletto.

According to this perspective, the asymmetries between the periphery—exporters of primary goods—and the industrialized countries at the center of the global economic system originated from two principal factors: 1. The international division of labor, which generated deteriorating terms of trade favorable to countries producing high value-added manufactured goods; 2. The actions of domestic elites in peripheral countries who, aligned with the interests of international capitalism, contributed to reinforcing the negative externalities of underdevelopment (Cardoso and Faletto 1975, 115).

As a result, a scenario of excessive dependence on the dynamic centers of global capitalism emerged, characterized by: distortions caused by chronic trade deficits; capital inflows combined with rising international interest rates; the widening scientific and technological gap between developed and developing countries.

To overcome this condition of structural dependence, ECLAC's developmentalist thinking advocated three main strategies: 1. Import-substitution industrialization; 2. Promotion of industrial exports; 3. Reform of international institutions to establish a more democratic world order capable of addressing the needs of developing countries (Caldas 2000).

It was within this context that Jânio Quadros, upon assuming the presidency in 1961, sought to use foreign policy as an effective instrument for Brazil's transformation. The foundations of the Independent Foreign Policy (PEI) were explicitly presented in an article authored by Quadros and

1970s with the independence of Guinea-Bissau (September 10, 1974), São Tomé and Príncipe (June 12, 1975), Cape Verde (July 5, 1975), Angola (November 11, 1975), and Mozambique (June 25, 1975).

4 Coined by the French historian Alfred Sauvy, the term "Third World" was first used in 1952 in an article he wrote that was published in the journal *L'Observateur* to refer to the group of developing countries located outside the two Cold War power blocs.

published in Foreign Affairs Magazine in August 1961, only days before his resignation from the presidency.[5]

Through PEI, Brazil moved away from its traditional alliance with the United States—a defining feature of Brazilian foreign policy since the era of Baron of Rio Branco—and adopted a more pragmatic strategy of international engagement characterized by partnerships with Third World countries. This orientation directly reflected two defining principles of the PEI: autonomy and universalization (Brazil 1995, Oliveira 2005).

As Lima (1994) observes, relations with the United States came to be viewed not as a means of increasing Brazil's bargaining power, but rather as a consequence of a broader expansion of that power, which should be achieved autonomously by Brazil itself. Accordingly, this power was expected to emerge from a global foreign policy strategy that considered new alliances based primarily on national interests rather than ideological alignments.

One of the central objectives of PEI was therefore to free Brazilian foreign policy from the ideological rigidity of the Cold War and reposition it within a more universalist vision of international relations, emphasizing the growing relevance of the North-South axis and reflecting the legacy of the historic Bandung Conference.[6]

The autonomy advocated by the PEI quickly translated into concrete multilateral positions. During the Eighth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of American States (OAS), held in Punta del Este in January 1962, Brazil, under the leadership of Foreign Minister San Tiago Dantas, joined Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Bolivia, and Ecuador in abstaining from the resolution suspending Cuba from the organization. Brazil also opposed American proposals advocating economic and diplomatic sanctions against Cuba (Oliveira 2005, Neto 2005).[7]

5 Shortly thereafter, in December 1961, the article was also published in issue No. 16 of the *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, in the documents section.

6 The first political initiative taken by the Third World countries was to hold a conference that would reaffirm their anti-imperialist stance and their position of equidistance from the U.S. and the USSR. The Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia in April 1955, proposed a new form of polarization: on one side, the industrialized countries of the North; on the other, the commodity-exporting countries of the South. In this ideological framework, the East-West confrontation gave way to the North-South confrontation. Subsequently, in Belgrade (1961), a new conference was held that led to the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement, reaffirming the political and ideological principles of Bandung. The Movement met again in Cairo in 1964, in Lusaka in 1970, and in Algiers in 1973 to discuss Third World policies and issues related to the global economy and the interests of these countries, such as commodity prices and international interest rates. In short, factors that constrained their bargaining power and contributed to widening the existing disparities with their counterparts in the North.

7 A few months later, in October, as the crisis worsened and risks to hemispheric security mounted, Brazil ultimately aligned itself with the U.S. position, voting within the OAS in favor of the naval blockade imposed

In September 1961, Brazilian Foreign Minister Affonso Arinos declared before the United Nations that "Brazil believes that only Cuba can determine its own destiny and expresses its conviction that, through this means, the democratic ideals and principles that guide Pan-Americanism will ultimately prevail." At the same time, negotiations advanced toward the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union,[8] while Brazil also expressed sympathy for the admission of the People's Republic of China into the United Nations.

These developments reveal a process of re-signification of Brazil's national image promoted by Jânio Quadros and Affonso Arinos, who projected the view that Brazil could no longer automatically identify its interests with those of the world's most developed nations. This perception was clearly expressed by Affonso Arinos during the opening of the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 22, 1961:

> It is thus entirely natural that countries like Brazil should be led to adopt an independent position on the world stage, with the rightful purpose of exerting their influence to reduce tensions, resolve disputes and gradually consolidate peace. [...] The world is not divided merely into East and West. This ideological cleavage makes us forget the existence of yet another division, not ideological, but economic and social - that between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. [...] Although its own ideological position is clearly defined, Brazil in its international relations seeks always to be guided by [...] the United Nations Charter, which states it to be a purpose of the Organization to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace. Hence, ideological differences per se will not prevent Brazil from maintaining relations with any other people (Brazil, 1995, p. 141-147)

on Cuba. This episode highlighted the pragmatic and contingent nature of the autonomy advocated by the PEI, which was closer to a strategy of loosening automatic alignment than to an actual break with U.S. leadership.

8 Diplomatic relations between Brazil and the Soviet Union were severed in October 1947, following a period of growing political tension between the two countries. This process had been unfolding since the previous year and intensified with the Eurico Gaspar Dutra administration's adoption of a markedly anti-communist domestic policy, which included revoking the Brazilian Communist Party's registration. The incident that precipitated the break was the publication of an article in the Soviet press that leveled harsh personal criticism at the Brazilian president, describing him, among other things, as "a coward", "a lackey of the United States," and "a coffee general." Although it was not the sole cause of the rupture, the incident served as the trigger for a diplomatic crisis that was already underway.

The United States, as expected, quickly demonstrated its dissatisfaction with both the PEI and Brazil's increasingly autonomous posture. This discontent became particularly evident following the Inter-American Economic Conference held in Punta del Este in August 1961.

On that occasion, the Cuban delegation led by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, then President of the Cuban Central Bank, refused to sign the Charter of Punta del Este, which established the guidelines for the Alliance for Progress—U.S.-backed development program for Latin America that promised up to US$20 billion in assistance.

Upon returning to Cuba, Che Guevara made a stop in Brasília, where President Jânio Quadros awarded him the Grand Cross of the Order of the Southern Cross, Brazil's highest decoration for foreign dignitaries. This symbolic gesture generated not only American displeasure but also strong criticism from conservative domestic sectors that had supported Quadros and increasingly perceived the PEI as a threat to their interests. The episode demonstrated that the ideological constraints from which Brazil sought to distance itself continued to exert significant influence over both foreign policy and domestic politics.

4. The Role of Images in the Independent Foreign Policy

Returning to the argument presented in the introduction, the study of the Independent Foreign Policy (PEI) is particularly significant because it represents the first historical formulation of a new paradigm for Brazil's international insertion, in which the Americanism that had prevailed since the era of Baron of Rio Branco gave way to a strategy based on the multilateralization of foreign relations and a more autonomous decision-making process.

During the PEI period, Brazil sought to align itself with an agenda emphasizing decolonization, disarmament, national development, and the self-determination of peoples. These themes, according to Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1995, 139), "expressed Brazil's determination to overcome the impoverishing dilemmas of ideological confrontation and assume an independent position in the international arena."

A new idea of Brazil thus emerged, grounded in the rejection of ideological boundaries and the expansion of strategic partnerships. The evidence presented throughout this study suggests that the assertion advanced by Brecher *et al.* (1969)—namely, that "the image a country has of itself and of other actors

in the international system constitutes a relevant element for understanding decision-making processes"—is particularly applicable to the case of PEI.

The events analyzed indicate that external elements of the operational environment did influence decision-making outcomes. However, these influences were filtered through the images held by decision-makers, who selected and organized information according to their goals and preferences. This process highlights the inherently selective nature of perception.

Within the historical context in which the PEI was formulated, Brazilian foreign policy internalized and projected a particular image of what Brazil was believed to be: a continental-sized, multicultural, and multiracial country determined to preserve its complete freedom of decision-making.

As illustrated by Affonso Arinos's speech before the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, a particularly influential perception underlying the conduct of PEI was that Brazil's condition of underdevelopment not only constrained its domestic transformation but also limited its capacity to exercise greater autonomy in the international arena. Overcoming this condition therefore required an emancipatory and transformative foreign policy capable of challenging prevailing economic and social structures (Dantas 1964, cited in Silva 1995).

Aware of its role within the international system and of the need to promote development as a prerequisite for exercising that role more effectively, Brazil began to orient its foreign policy around two fundamental principles: decision-making autonomy and Universalization of international relations.

This reorientation allows us to argue that PEI emerged from a shared perception among decision-making elites that Brazil could no longer limit its international engagement to the framework of traditional Pan-Americanism. This perception played a dual role: first, it functioned as a cognitive filter through which international reality was interpreted, and images of the external environment were constructed. Second, it served as a pre-existing guide to action, anchored in a set of beliefs and values that preceded and shaped the decision-making process associated with PEI.

It was through this awakening of a new consciousness—strongly influenced by ECLAC's developmentalist formulations and by the construction of a common identity among Latin American and other peripheral countries—that Brazil began to prioritize cooperation with Third World nations instead of maintaining automatic alignment with the United States.

In this context, overcoming the rigid frameworks imposed by the Cold War represented not only an expansion of Brazil's decision-making autonomy, but also greater freedom of dialogue and the possibility of developing

international relations—particularly economic ones—relatively independent of the ideological orientations of its partners.

Influenced by this cognitive map, Brazil played a decisive role in the convening of the First United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), held in Geneva in 1964.[9] The objective was to create a preferential system granting developing countries immediate and unrestricted access to the markets of developed nations, while exempting them from reciprocal obligations[10] (Queiroz 2012). This initiative reflected a broader image of Brazil's position within the international system and its commitment to promoting a more equitable international economic order.

The image Brazil constructed of itself as an autonomous actor therefore played a central role in guiding the policymakers responsible for formulating PEI. This orientation was grounded in a structured critique of the bipolar Cold War system, viewed as an obstacle to national development.

Such a self-image—of a country endowed with increasing decision-making autonomy—may be interpreted, according to Herz's (1994) terminology, as the result of historically constituted cognitive structures that simultaneously sustain and reproduce this perception, functioning both as interpretative frameworks and as constitutive components of the decision-making process itself.

The legacy of this continuous selection of stimuli, based on attitudes, expectations, needs, and cultural elements, contributed to the construction of a broad and coherent cognitive framework. This imagetic construct would become the guiding principle behind Brazilian actions opposing what Foreign Minister João Augusto de Araújo Castro (1963-1964), famously described as the "freezing of world power", reaffirming Brazil's resistance to automatic alignments and to the division of the world into fixed spheres of influence.

In this sense, PEI was not merely a diplomatic strategy. It was also the manifestation of a specific way of interpreting international reality, shaped by shared beliefs, values, and images that influenced how decision-makers perceived opportunities, threats, and national interests. Consequently, this case study provides strong evidence that images can function as powerful cognitive mechanisms capable of organizing preferences, filtering information, and guiding foreign policy behavior.

9 UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) was established by UN Resolution 917.

10 The U.S. vehemently opposed the idea, arguing that the proposal by UNCTAD and the developing countries, which opposed the GATT Most-Favored-Nation clause, would create serious trade distortions as, if implemented, it would result in the developing countries gaining control over raw materials and, consequently, control over the economic systems of developed countries.

5. Final Remarks

The analysis conducted throughout this study has shown, based on a representative sample of the literature on the influence of cognitive factors in foreign policy decision-making, that perception precedes decision-making and may, to a significant extent, be linked to a set of beliefs, values, and images carried by political actors.

In turn, this cognitive repertoire guides and, in some cases, determines actions within decision-making processes in which the construction of identities—and their corresponding images—becomes a decisive factor in the formation of national interests.

More specifically, it was possible to observe that, within the context of the Independent Foreign Policy (PEI), images functioned as guides to behavior based on a continuous selection of stimuli considered relevant to understanding the decision-making process.

Likewise, it was found that certain actors—simultaneously responsible for both the formulation and implementation of foreign policy—selected, from the complex and multifaceted circumstances of the period, those pieces of information considered most relevant for the construction of goals and preferences that would orient political action.

This analysis does not allow for definitive determination, but it strongly suggests that cognitive variables—particularly the images discussed throughout this article—influenced the formulation of the Independent Foreign Policy by functioning as interpretative filters through which information was selected and evaluated.

Consistent with this mode of operation, one of the practical outcomes of PEI was the strengthening of Brazil's situational awareness regarding its role within the international decision-making arena. This process was sustained by increasingly autonomous positions and by the diversification of Brazil's relations with actors characterized by distinct interests and ideological orientations.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the cognitive approach alone is insufficient to fully explain the Independent Foreign Policy. In this regard, complementary studies capable of establishing a dialogue between the cognitive dimensions identified here and other analytical approaches—such as the rational actor or the bureaucratic-governmental models—may provide valuable investigative tools for a more comprehensive understanding of the decision-making patterns that characterized the period.

As the present study implicitly suggests, a broader and more accurate understanding of the decision-making environment associated with PEI requires simultaneous consideration of both the role of images and the influence of objective variables, including power relations and the material interests of the actors involved.

Such an approach allows due recognition to be given to the material elements of international relations, since they define both the limits of state action and the relative costs associated with choosing given options of action. At the same time, it preserves an appreciation of the meaning that decision-makers attribute to these material forces.

Accordingly, it may be inferred that images do not concern only the social environment within which actors interact. They also shape the meaning attributed to material issues and to power itself, whose significance is constituted largely through ideas and the contexts in which identities take form.

By recognizing the relevance of imagetic tools for the analysis of the Independent Foreign Policy, it becomes possible to accept the validity of Wendt's premise that "material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded" (Wendt 1995, 73).

This understanding leads to the conclusion that states should not be conceived as purely objective material entities. Rather, they are actors whose identities, interests, and patterns of behavior are socially constituted and reconstituted through intersubjective structures of knowledge that shape the perception and interpretation of international reality.

Finally, it is important to highlight the undeniable importance of specialized bureaucracies in the domestic process of image construction. In this regard, as Russell (1990, 259) observes, the Independent Foreign Policy represented a milestone in expanding the role of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in shaping the imagetic foundations of Brazilian foreign policy.

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