

Rio Branco Institute. Tradition and Evolution: Actors Playing Roles on a Changeable Stage

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Diplomacy is manifold. It is the singular art of conducting formal relations between countries, negotiating treaties, representing nations and conveying accurate information in order to attain the goal of maintaining peace and avoiding war. It requires a myriad of skills from diplomats as governmental agents. The defying stage of international relations imposes on each actor multiple talents as the play is written by History, a dramatist who dives into the waves of the eternal ocean of knowledge and clear-sightedness. Thus, diplomacy plays an ongoing role that comes from the past, has contemporary twists and foresees storms and good winds.

States seek to have well trained and competent diplomats able to offer high-level professional performances and to face contemporary challenges and sudden changes in the world scenario. The Federative Republic of Brazil follows the same path to reach this goal concerning the formation of Brazilian diplomats throughout their careers.

The Brazilian Diplomatic Academy, Rio Branco Institute, following the tradition since the independence of Brazil in 1822, has adapted itself

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since its foundation in 1945 to mould its activities according to the needs of the national foreign policy in a constantly changing world.

The 21st. century has new actors, new scripts, new characters and new hazard scenarios as History continues to unfold events for mankind to behold, act and solve. The stage of international relations is evolving according to the waves of History and diplomats cannot depend upon a *deus ex machina*, but seek and find real solutions for the ever-changing plots.

History

The Rio Branco Institute was created in 1945 in the context of the celebration of the birth centennial of Barão do Rio Branco, patron of Brazilian diplomacy. Its creation aimed at training public servants of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil and at being a cornerstone and think tank of diplomacy and international relations studies. During the last seventy-six years, it has become a reference among diplomatic academies around the world.

More than two thousand diplomats have graduated since 1946, invariably by means of public tender for the Course of Preparation to the Diplomatic Career, presently known as Diplomatic Training Course. The academy is also responsible for the Mid-Career Training Course and the Higher Studies Course, mandatorily required to allow further career growth.

Recruitment before the foundation of the Institute

Brazil has always underlined the necessity of having well trained public servants to perform multiple tasks related to the national foreign policy. Even though the idea came together in 1945, it dates back to the Brazilian Empire, during the first half of the 19th century when successive ministries of foreign affairs created legal rules to embrace the ideal profile for a diplomat and the pre-requisites for selecting candidates (good command of modern languages as well as knowledge of law, economics, history, geography and other domains of human and social sciences).

In due course, President Getúlio Vargas founded the Diplomatic Academy, Rio Branco Institute, on April, 18th, 1945. The next decades would witness

the consolidation of legal frames for the Public Tender of Admission of Candidates, the Preparatory Course to the Diplomatic Career, the implementation of the Higher Studies Course in 1977 and of the Mid-Career Training Course in 1978, as well as the recognition of the Preparatory Course as equivalent to a master's degree in 2002.

The Brazilian Diplomatic Academy is responsible for shaping public servants according to the tradition of Brazilian foreign policy.

Contemporary recruitment

The main challenge of the Rio Branco Institute in recent years has been to reconcile its tradition in the training and improvement of diplomatic personnel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil with the new demands and skills that are currently required of diplomats. The Rio Branco Institute is the only way to enter the diplomatic career (the appointment of heads of mission is the prerogative of the President of the Republic, under the terms of the Federal Constitution of 1988).

The Institute selects diplomats through a public tender, which has been held annually since 1946 and is considered one of the most difficult and competitive in Brazil. In 2020, 6218 candidates were registered for 25 positions. The exams assess candidates' knowledge of subjects — such as world history and Brazilian history, international politics, geography, economics, international law and constitutional law. In addition, as part of the selection process, tests in Portuguese, English, Spanish and French are carried out.

The exams are divided into three main phases. The first one evaluates general knowledge through complex and elaborate multiple-choice questions. The ones who are selected for the second phase have to undergo essay and summary questions in Portuguese as well as translation and version in the English language. Both phases are eliminatory and require minimum threshold scores for candidates to succeed. The third phase is the most demanding as it encompasses all subjects in discursive questions, except Portuguese and English, but including French and Spanish.

The fourth phase comprehends the action of committees to evaluate and approval of the accuracy of ethnic self-declarations of candidates

who apply for the exams under the aegis of the legal frame of affirmative action programs, ethnic inclusion as well as handicap quotas.

The selected candidates are appointed to the Brazilian Foreign Service, in the class of third secretary of the diplomatic career, and enter Rio Branco Institute. New diplomats must complete, as public servants, a trial period of three years, which include, as a first activity, the completion of the Diplomatic Training Course. The completion of this course is a condition for the diplomat's confirmation in public service.

Affirmative action program

In 2002, Rio Branco Institute created its Affirmative Action Program (PAA), which awards scholarships to black candidates who wish to study for the Institute's rigorous entrance exam. The above-mentioned program constitutes a pioneering initiative aiming to strengthen the preparedness of these candidates and, therefore, bring more diversity to the Brazilian Foreign Service.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs works with other governmental institutions such as the National Secretariat for the Advancement of Racial Equality (SNPIR) and the National Council for Scientific Development (CNPq) in order to implement the aforementioned Program.

Twelve years later, in 2012, a law was passed requiring all national exams for governmental positions to establish that up to 20% of jobs offered would be filled by black candidates. Once again, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was one of the first institutions to incorporate the new requirement. It must be noted, however, that, with the new law which created quotas, adjustments were made in the Affirmative Action Program in order to improve its efficiency and to further bolster its association with Rio Branco Institute's entrance exams. Nowadays, candidates vying for the scholarship must make satisfactory grades during the admissions process in order to qualify for the Program.

Diplomatic training course

The preparation for the diplomatic career is one of the main activities of Rio Branco Institute. It is mandatory for Brazilian diplomats to enroll in the "Dip-

lomatic Training Course” (DTC) immediately after recruitment. The program aims at equipping newly appointed diplomats with the knowledge and skills that will allow them to perform their duties in an efficient manner.

The DTC currently takes 15 months, and comprises regular classes, seminars, special lectures and study trips. The curriculum maintains some traditional core disciplines, such as international politics, international law, economics, and history of Brazilian foreign policy. In order to respond to present day challenges inherent to diplomatic practice, it also comprises other subjects, including, among others, negotiation techniques, cyberdiplomacy, public diplomacy and media training.

It is also required to follow classes on foreign languages, in order to improve the mastery of this fundamental skill for diplomats. English, French and Spanish are mandatory and a very high level of command of these languages is expected. It is also obligatory to follow a course in one of the other three United Nations official languages. The students must opt for classes on Arabic, Chinese or Russian.

The Institute does not have a permanent teaching staff. Teaching is usually delivered by means of lectures given by senior diplomats and academic specialists on specific subjects. The instructors may also employ other teaching methods, where appropriate, including, especially, small group seminars and group discussions.

The activities of the Diplomatic Training Course were carried out, in 2020 and 2021, in virtual format, due to sanitary restrictions, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The course in virtual format made possible the activities of the Institute without interruption. Despite the difficulties derived from an adaptation carried out in emergency conditions, the experience had clearly positive aspects, given the possibilities that the use of digital platforms offers in terms of the training of diplomats, in various forms, such as remote meetings with diplomats responsible for Brazilian Missions abroad, with Brazilian and foreign authorities and with specialists in areas of knowledge of interest to diplomacy.

Technological tools of the genre constitute a valuable instrument and tend to become an integral part of the pedagogical resources of daily use. Its use, however, cannot lose sight of an essential function of the work of the Institute’s diplomats and professors — the socialization of new colleagues in the practices and uses of diplomacy, the unwritten rules the mastery of which

can be decisive in the official's interactions with his peers, in the ministry or abroad. The need for permanent updating of diplomatic personnel, in order to be able to face the new needs of the international arena, led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to adopt, at the end of the 1970s, advanced courses, which constitute legal requirements for functional progression. Law nº 11.440 of 2006, which establishes the norms for the Brazilian Foreign Service, determines that the completion of courses are requirements for promotion from second secretary to first secretary and from counselor to second class minister.

In the last decades, due to the pace of change in the world of technology, profound challenges have appeared in the art of diplomacy. In order to prepare our diplomats for these demands, new subjects have recently been offered at the Brazilian Diplomatic Academy.

First, underscoring the fundamental importance of the scale and speed of technological advancements in cyberspace, *cyber diplomacy* has been offered in both the Diplomatic Training Course and Mid-Career Training Programme. The main objective is to provide our diplomats with the tools and initiatives required to achieve Brazil's national interests in cyberspace — crystallised in our national cybersecurity strategies and priorities.

Second, taking into consideration the interactive dimension of diplomacy with a multitude of actors and networks, *public diplomacy* has also been included in our courses. Rio Branco Institute aspires to offer our diplomats useful methods, tools and techniques to improve public diplomacy practices, so that they are able to respond to the demands of the press, social media, and other actors.

Third, reflecting the profound challenges corollary of the new frameworks of technology and information, *Data Science* has also been incorporated into our curriculum. It aims to prepare our diplomats to cope with a broad spectrum of interactions among data and diplomacy, as well as diplomatic principles and practices, rooted in the daily necessity of diplomacy, such as methods, values, policies, and other dimensions of data or data use.

Mid-career training program

As one of the programs maintained by Rio Branco Institute, the Mid-Career Training Course is aimed at second secretaries with an average of

10 years of service and constitutes one of the requirements for advancement in the profession.

The Mid-Career Training Course was implemented in 1978. Since that year, one or two annual editions of the course have been held, the objective of which is to strengthen the diplomat's leadership capacity and deepen his knowledge in areas of interest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As an example of what happens with the Training Course, the curriculum of the programme is updated to each edition and mixes traditional disciplines, such as international politics and consular practice, and subjects that have recently been integrated into the program, such as cyber diplomacy and diplomacy of scientific innovation. Since 2021, the Mid-Career Training Course uses a distance learning program to carry it out, using the moodle platform, one of the most used by higher education institutions, which have distance education centers. The objective, therefore, is to match the tradition and excellence of Rio Branco Institute with the new teaching methodologies within the frame of recent technological tools.

This system allows the organization of the content of the disciplines, such as bibliographic references, lectures, classes and questions, available online. The new methodology also matches available online resources and traditional disciplines to train diplomats with new digital skills. The format allows the inclusion of professors and students working in different countries and encourages the participation of diplomats in various simulation exercises and practical discussions. It also allows a significant saving of resources, since the face-to-face format is not used, which implied expenses with international air tickets and per diem extra wages.

Differently from the perception regarding the Diplomatic Training Course, the experience with the Diplomatic Improvement Course, using a distance learning program, has been positive, since the second secretaries have already gone through basic training and social institutional interaction. As the course aims to improve and review specific knowledge of diplomatic activities, its virtual format reveals itself suitable and effective.

Higher studies course

One of the statutory duties that Rio Branco Institute fulfills is to train and assess Brazilian diplomats at various stages in their careers, thus enabling them

for the usual promotions. The highest step in this task involves demanding and evaluating dissertations written by our diplomats at the rank of counselor, which is called the “Higher Studies Course”. Those willing to go further in their career must write a 150-page thesis, which will be assessed by an examining bench, made up of ambassadors and academics with specific knowledge on the subject of work. If the written thesis is approved, the candidate must undergo an oral presentation before an Examining Bench.

This system was established in 1977 and since then we have collected some 1000 dissertations on a variety of topics — history, international relations, economics, technology, culture, consular issues and other subjects. A significant number has been published as books and are available to the public. This system contributes much to our “think tank” profile, enriching our database for internal assessment and reflection as well as academic discussions in Brazil and abroad.

In 2021, also in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the sanitary restrictions in Brazil, the Higher Studies Course was totally carried out virtually. The experience has been truly positive, because the course format does not require constant interaction between diplomats. The oral defense of the theses was carried out perfectly in virtual format and the results were really satisfactory. A virtual format for this course has shown positive results and will probably continue to be used, mainly because it allows significant resource savings in budgetary planning.

International cooperation

International cooperation with similar institutions around the world is one of the key activities developed by the Rio Branco Institute. We have agreements with some 70 diplomatic academies, as we understand that welcoming foreign diplomats to study with our own reflects an overall positive relationship with the countries that send their diplomats here. The demand for a seat at our diplomatic academy is high, with up to one third of each yearly class being composed of foreign diplomats. Traditionally, young diplomats from Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa and Asia. Diplomats from Latin America are also enrolled each year, but we are open to all partners, and it is not uncommon to see in the same

class at the Institute a diplomat from Europe discussing Brazilian history with a colleague from Asia.

Most of our international agreements take the form of memoranda of understanding. Foreign diplomats follow a two-semester course. It is requested that they have some fluency in Portuguese, as most of our classes and lectures are in our official language. In addition, they are expected to be new to the diplomatic career. Some of the exchange students we host are posted at their embassies in Brasilia, but most come especially for the course at the Institute.

The cooperation program for foreign diplomats is supported by the Brazilian Agency of Cooperation and our unit dedicated to the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries. The Institute has welcomed 275 foreign diplomats from 55 different countries since 1976.

Rio Branco Institute is about to implement a virtual group of alumni in the official website in order to maintain links with former foreign students and establish a forum to discuss and face the new challenges of the contemporary international agenda as well as sharing experiences in other correlated professional domains.

A training course for diplomats from Guinea-Bissau will be held in 2021 for the first time using a distance learning program. In addition to lectures on international politics, specific knowledge of diplomatic activities, such as protocol will be included. The idea is that this format is an additional tool to be used in international cooperation projects of the Rio Branco Institute, so that cadres of foreign diplomatic services can be formed and trained from Brazil.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federative Republic of Brazil has been able to face new challenges and scenarios along the years, especially at the dawn of 21st century. Brazilian diplomats have responded in an effective way to a plethora of defying situations in the various activities diplomacy requires both in Brazil and abroad.

One of the main reasons for them to succeed as governmental agents for the accomplishment and fulfillment of the Brazilian foreign policy is the

professional profile they have developed throughout the career and from the very beginning at Rio Branco Institute.

Our diplomatic academy has pursued ways to walk on the path of innovation and renewal without renouncing the traditional canons that have transformed diplomacy into the art of peace.

On the changeable and mutable stage of international relations that evolves fleetingly with swift steps, our diplomatic actors have to be able to perform their roles always inspired by Clio, the muse of History, daughter of Mnemosyne, the goddess of Memory. As wards of examples from the past, they also have to embrace the spirit of Apollo, who presided over the nine muses and represented the symbol of prophetic inspiration. Through diplomacy, science and arts, diplomats, in a similar way to Apollo and the muses, as believed by the ancient Greeks, help governments to restore and maintain peace for mankind.