

Tordesillas (1494) And Madrid (1750): The Boundary Treaties Between The Kingdoms Of Portugal And Spain That Shaped Brazil's Mineral Wealth And Diversity And Their Implications For The Twenty-First Century

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Abstract:

Background: This study examines the consequences of two boundary treaties signed between Portugal and Spain that established the foundations of Brazil's territorial configuration and contributed to the formation of the mineral wealth and diversity found within its subsoil. Initially, it presents the historical antecedents that culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. Subsequently, it describes the events and circumstances that fostered the territorial expansion of the former Portuguese overseas colony, resulting in the signing of the Treaty of Madrid in 1750. Finally, it investigates how the territorial formation process that occurred between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries contributed to the availability of mineral resources within Brazilian territory. The general objective of this study is to analyze how the Treaties of Tordesillas (1494) and Madrid (1750), concluded between Portugal and Spain, contributed to the establishment of a broad and diversified mineral resource base in Brazil, as well as to discuss the implications of this territorial legacy in the twenty-first century.

Materials and Methods: This research adopted a qualitative approach aimed at investigating the potential of Brazil's mining sector to promote the country's economic and industrial development. As a methodological procedure, a bibliographic and documentary review was conducted, involving the consultation of sources classified into three categories: (1) sources presenting historical facts related to the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas; (2) sources describing the events that enabled Brazilian territorial expansion beyond the Tordesillas Line, culminating in the signing of the Treaty of Madrid; and (3) sources demonstrating the mineral wealth and diversity found within the Brazilian subsoil and their implications in the twenty-first century.

Results: The findings indicate that Brazil possesses significant potential to consolidate its position as a global leader in the commercialization of mineral resources that are essential for the production of high-technology goods and services. The territorial expansion achieved through the historical processes associated with the Treaties of Tordesillas and Madrid contributed to the incorporation of extensive mineral-rich regions, providing the country with a strategic reserve of natural resources that remains highly relevant in contemporary economic and technological contexts.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the territorial legacy resulting from the Treaties of Tordesillas and Madrid played a fundamental role in shaping Brazil's mineral resource endowment. This historical process contributed to the formation of a diversified mineral base that currently represents a strategic asset for national development. In the twenty-first century, the growing global demand for critical and strategic minerals reinforces the importance of Brazil's mineral wealth, highlighting its potential contribution to industrial innovation, technological advancement, and sustainable economic development.

Key Word: Treaty of Tordesillas; Treaty of Madrid; Mineral Resources; Territorial Expansion; Mining; Mercantilism.

Date of Submission: 01-07-2026

Date of Acceptance: 10-07-2026

I. Introduction

During the fifteenth century, Europe traded goods and commodities originating from the Indies (Asia), which were typically distributed through the ports of Genoa and Venice, both located in the Mediterranean region and controlled by Italy. However, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 marked the end of the Byzantine Empire and, among its many consequences, disrupted the commercial routes linking Asia, the Mediterranean, and European consumer markets.

This historical event stimulated European nations to seek alternative maritime routes to the Indies by circumnavigating the African continent. Consequently, the Age of Exploration emerged, characterizing the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and contributing to the rise of European powers, initially Portugal and Spain, and later England, France, and the Netherlands. In this context, the Atlantic Ocean became the principal maritime corridor connecting Europe to Asia.

The Age of Exploration expanded both supplier and consumer markets, fostering international trade and contributing to the development of mercantilism and early capitalism. Within this framework, Portugal and Spain emerged as pioneers in overseas expansion, achieving the status of the first major European maritime powers.

Portugal, owing to its strategic location on the Iberian Peninsula, chose to explore the western coast of Africa, navigate around the southern tip of the continent, cross the Indian Ocean, and ultimately reach Asia. Spain, by contrast, sought to access the Indies by sailing westward across the Atlantic Ocean toward Asia. This mission was entrusted to the Italian navigator Christopher Columbus. Broadly speaking, it was within this historical context that Columbus's arrival in the Americas in 1492 and Pedro Álvares Cabral's arrival in Brazil in 1500 took place.

Within the mercantilist system, Portugal and Spain established overseas colonies primarily aimed at extracting natural resources, particularly gold, silver, and precious stones. Consequently, Spanish America and Brazil became strategic Atlantic possessions intended to fulfill these economic objectives.

During the colonization of the so-called New World, political, economic, and social activities driven by the interests of the Iberian metropolises often resulted in Portuguese incursions into territories formally claimed by Spain and vice versa. Diplomatic negotiations emerged as the primary mechanism for resolving such disputes, culminating in the signing of boundary treaties.

In the specific case of Colonial Brazil, these boundary agreements between Portugal and Spain enabled significant territorial transformations over the centuries, incorporating extensive natural resources into Brazilian territory, including water resources, mineral deposits, biodiversity, fauna, and flora.

The present study focuses specifically on the legacy of the mineral resources that Brazil permanently incorporated into its national patrimony following its independence from the Portuguese Crown. At this point, history becomes fundamental for understanding past developments and their influence on contemporary realities. Given the strategic importance of mineral resources for economic development, this historical analysis assumes particular relevance, providing insights capable of informing present actions and future initiatives.

When Brazil emerged as an independent nation in 1822, did it inherit sufficient mineral resources to support economic growth and development, particularly in the twenty-first century? This question constitutes the central inquiry addressed by the present research.

Regarding the methodological approach, a qualitative research design was adopted. Concerning the methods of investigation, the study was based on bibliographic and documentary research conducted through the analysis of national and international publications, scientific articles, governmental documents, reports issued by multinational institutions, and online resources. The consultation, examination, and synthesis of these materials made it possible to identify and analyze the principal issues addressed in this study.

Accordingly, the general objective of this research is to analyze how the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and the Treaty of Madrid (1750), negotiated between Portugal and Spain, contributed to the formation of Brazil's extensive and diversified mineral wealth and to examine the implications of this territorial legacy in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the study seeks to provide insights for political, economic, and scientific-technological institutions regarding how Brazil's historical trajectory may contribute to raising awareness and prioritizing public policies aimed at the effective management of the country's mineral resources.

To achieve this purpose, the specific objectives are: (i) to present the historical antecedents that led to the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494; (ii) to describe the events and developments in Brazil and Portugal that justified the signing of the Treaty of Madrid with Spain in 1750; and (iii) to demonstrate the richness and diversity of mineral resources within the Brazilian subsoil and discuss their implications for the country in the twenty-first century.

To accomplish these objectives, this article is structured into four sections that provide a comprehensive analysis of the mineral wealth and diversity of the Brazilian subsoil resulting from Brazil's territorial formation process since the fifteenth century. The first section, Introduction, presents the central theme of the study. The second section, Methodology, describes the research approach, including data collection and analytical procedures. The third section, Theoretical Framework, examines the Treaty of Tordesillas, discusses the principal

events that expanded the boundaries of Colonial Brazil beyond the Tordesillas meridian and culminated in the Treaty of Madrid, and analyzes the richness and diversity of Brazil's mineral resources and their implications in the twenty-first century.

Finally, the Final Considerations section synthesizes the principal findings of the research and provides insights for political, economic, and scientific-technological institutions regarding how Brazil's historical development can contribute to fostering awareness and prioritizing public policies directed toward the effective national management of Brazilian mineral resources.

II. Material And Methods

The methodological approach adopted in this study was qualitative in nature, as its primary objective was to analyze how the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and the Treaty of Madrid (1750), negotiated between Portugal and Spain, contributed to the formation of Brazil's extensive and diversified mineral wealth and to examine the implications of this territorial legacy in the twenty-first century. This approach is widely recognized within the scientific community for its ability to provide contextual analyses, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how Brazil's historical development may contribute to supporting political, economic, and scientific-technological institutions in raising awareness and prioritizing public policies aimed at the effective national management of Brazilian mineral resources. Furthermore, qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation and understanding of complex phenomena, making it particularly suitable for studies involving historically significant events, mineral resources, and issues related to economic, industrial, and technological development.

With regard to the methodological procedures, the study was classified as bibliographic research. This type of investigation is based on the systematic analysis of previously published scientific literature and constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of scientific knowledge production. According to Pereira et al. (2018), bibliographic research contributes to the consolidation of theoretical and methodological frameworks by compiling and interpreting significant contributions related to a specific topic. Similarly, Yin (2016) argues that this method enhances the analytical robustness of research by grounding discussions in established theoretical foundations.

For the purposes of this review, the research sources were selected and categorized into three groups: (1) sources presenting historical facts that culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas; (2) sources describing the events and processes that enabled Brazil's territorial expansion westward beyond the Tordesillas Line, ultimately leading to the signing of the Treaty of Madrid; and (3) sources demonstrating the richness and diversity of mineral resources within the Brazilian subsoil and examining their implications in the twenty-first century.

The classification of these sources facilitated a broader understanding of the importance of studying the history of Portuguese colonization in Brazil and its consequences for the country's mineral resource endowment. The bibliographic and documentary review was conducted through the consultation of national and international publications, scientific articles, documents issued by national and international governmental institutions, reports from multinational organizations, and online resources. This comprehensive approach ensured broad coverage of the subject matter and enabled an assessment of how Brazil's historical trajectory may contribute to political, economic, and scientific-technological institutions in promoting awareness and prioritizing public policies directed toward the effective national management of Brazilian mineral resources.

III. Theoretical Framework

To begin, a thought-provoking premise may be considered: history possesses the undeniable capacity to connect the past with the present. By understanding the factors and circumstances that gave rise to particular historical events, individuals become better equipped to interpret the complexities of the contemporary world. Such an approach reinforces the perception that history is a "living" instrument that contributes to understanding local, national, and global transformations that continue to unfold (Sousa, 2024).

Based on this perspective, the theoretical framework of this study was organized into three subsections. The first subsection presents the Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494. The second subsection describes the events and developments that justified the signing of the Treaty of Madrid in 1750. The third and final subsection examines the extent to which Brazil inherited a rich and diversified mineral resource base as a consequence of the territorial agreements established between Portugal and Spain and discusses how the country may benefit from this legacy in the economic, industrial, energy, and technological sectors during the twenty-first century.

The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494)

During the first half of the fifteenth century, a combination of factors transformed the European continent, particularly in the late Middle Ages. These changes were driven by the expansion of markets, the consolidation of national monarchies, and significant technological and scientific advances. Merchants, led primarily by the Portuguese, sought to expand their spheres of influence by establishing commercial contacts and

exchanges first with Africa, then with Asia, and eventually with the Americas. Among the principal motivations for this expansion was the search for precious metals and other valuable resources (Monteiro, 2001).

These developments contributed to increasing rivalry between Portugal and Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, as both crowns sought to discover new routes capable of breaking the commercial monopoly exercised by Muslims, Genoese merchants, and Venetians over European trade. Their primary objectives included acquiring new territories, securing access to wealth, and establishing direct connections to lucrative markets, particularly those of the East (Muradás, 2008).

For the Portuguese Crown, the central concern involved the high prices of Asian spices and the expansionist ambitions of Spain, then composed of the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile. Consequently, maritime exploration emerged as a geopolitical strategy aimed at identifying new opportunities for economic expansion and commercial development (Muradás, 2008).

Meanwhile, in 1490, the Genoese navigator Christopher Columbus presented to the Catholic Monarchs a proposal to reach the Indies by sailing westward, based on the belief that the Earth was spherical. The only unforeseen circumstance was the presence of the American continent along the proposed route. Columbus reached the Americas in 1492, inaugurating Spain's remarkable participation in the era of European maritime expansion (Monteiro, 2001).

Upon Columbus's return to Europe, Spain and Portugal began disputing jurisdiction over the newly discovered territories. Seeking to secure exclusive control over these lands, the Catholic Monarchs initiated intense diplomatic negotiations and, in 1493, sought the support of Pope Alexander VI to establish a formal framework for resolving the matter (Duve, 2026). These negotiations arose because, during his return voyage from the Americas, Columbus encountered a severe storm and was forced to anchor near Lisbon. Although his expedition had been financed by the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand II and Isabella I, he was compelled to share news of his discoveries with King John II of Portugal (Silver, 2022).

It is important to note that, during this period, the medieval tradition of papal political supremacy remained influential. The Holy See was widely regarded as possessing the authority to allocate territories and peoples among Christian rulers. Historical precedents included Pope Adrian IV granting Ireland to the King of England and Pope Sixtus IV assigning the Canary Islands to the Crown of Castile (Corrêa, 2009).

As a result, the Atlantic Ocean became a significant area of commercial and geopolitical conflict between Portugal and Spain. Pope Alexander VI intervened by issuing the papal bull *Inter Caetera* in 1493, a political instrument that later served as the foundation for the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 (França, 2005). The bull established an imaginary line extending from the North Pole to the South Pole, located approximately one hundred leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. All territories situated west of this line would belong to Spain, whereas those located east of it would belong to Portugal (Silva; Bastos, 1976; Cartwright, 2021).

Because King John II of Portugal refused to accept the provisions of the *Inter Caetera* bull, the Iberian powers entered into direct negotiations that culminated in the Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494. This agreement granted both nations revised rights of discovery and territorial occupation (Brown, 2022). As demonstrated by these negotiations, Portugal and Spain, deeply engaged in exploration, commerce, and colonization, sought to secure control over territories and islands that had already been discovered or might yet be discovered in the future (Corrêa, 2009).

The Treaty of Tordesillas (Figure 1) resulted from a year-long diplomatic process characterized by uncertainty and a substantial risk of armed conflict between the two kingdoms (Silver, 2022). Ultimately, the treaty was signed on June 7, 1494, establishing a new demarcation line between the Portuguese and Spanish crowns. This line extended from pole to pole and was positioned 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, as illustrated in Figure 2 (Silva; Bastos, 1976; UNESCO, 2007; Assad, 2011; Duve, 2026).

Figure 1. Treaty of Tordesillas (1494).



Source: UNESCO (2007)

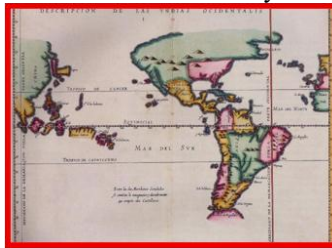
The Iberian governments effectively partitioned the “New World” without considering any future territorial claims that might be advanced by the British, French, or other European powers (NGS, 2024). The demarcation line established by the treaty encompassed the eastern portion of what would later become Brazil, as this region fell within the Portuguese sphere of influence (UNESCO, 2007).

Accordingly, the Treaty of Tordesillas granted Portugal a sphere of influence in the Atlantic Ocean, with the exception of the Canary Islands, while Spain obtained control over the territories recently discovered by Christopher Columbus located west of the demarcation line. Despite the numerous challenges associated with its implementation, the treaty established the foundations for the division of the Americas into Portuguese and Spanish domains (Duve, 2026). Its provisions were formally ratified in 1506 by Pope Julius II through the papal bull *Ea Quae Pro Bono Pacis*, thereby legitimizing the Portuguese presence in the Americas (Assad, 2011).

In practical terms, the treaty immediately secured for Portugal control over the waters of the South Atlantic, which were essential for the navigational maneuver known as the *volta do mar*. This maritime technique enabled Portuguese navigators to avoid ocean currents that pushed vessels northward when sailing close to the southwestern coast of Africa and simultaneously facilitated passage around the Cape of Good Hope (Corrêa, 2009).

The consequences of the Treaty of Tordesillas remain visible throughout the Americas to this day. For example, nearly all Latin American countries are predominantly Spanish-speaking nations, with Brazil constituting the principal exception, where Portuguese became the national language. This outcome resulted from the fact that the eastern portion of Brazil was located east of the demarcation line established by the treaty and consequently became the primary area of Portuguese colonization (NGS, 2024).

Figure 2. Map of the Meridian Established by the Treaty of Tordesillas.



Source: National Geographic Society (2024)

This document is considered essential for understanding the history and the economic and cultural relations established between Europe and the Americas. It has become an important reference for the collective memory of humanity, symbolizing the encounter between continents and civilizations separated by the Atlantic Ocean (UNESCO, 2007).

In 1500, when Pedro Álvares Cabral arrived in Brazil with a fleet consisting of three caravels and ten larger vessels carrying approximately 1,500 men, the new Portuguese colony encompassed an estimated area of 2,650,000 square kilometers (Assad, 2011). Centuries later, this same territory would reveal a wide range of mineral resources of considerable importance to the Brazilian economy and industrial sector.

Figure 3 provides a perspective of what the Portuguese overseas territory represented at the time, superimposed upon the current administrative division of Brazil. It can be observed that the Portuguese domain would have fully encompassed the present-day Northeast Region, most of the Southeast Region, a small portion of the Central-West Region, and would have largely excluded the territories corresponding to the contemporary North and South Regions of Brazil.

Figure 3. The Tordesillas Meridian and the Current Administrative Division of Brazil.



Source: Damasceno (2015)

It may be partially concluded that the Treaty of Tordesillas, signed by Portugal and Spain, effectively allocated a vast portion of territory to Portugal even before the discovery of Brazil in 1500. This extensive territory was endowed with a wide range of natural resources, including significant mineral deposits which, as will be demonstrated in subsequent sections, possess considerable potential to contribute to Brazil's economic and industrial development in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the territorial framework established by the treaty laid the foundations for the incorporation of strategic resource-rich regions that would later play an important role in the country's historical, economic, and geopolitical trajectory.

The Treaty of Madrid (1750)

In the centuries following the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, Brazil's western frontier expanded steadily and significantly. Portuguese-Brazilian settlement progressively extended beyond the limits established by the Tordesillas meridian, a process that accelerated particularly during the eighteenth century following the discovery of gold in the Brazilian interior. Consequently, Spain and Portugal were compelled to revisit the provisions of the Treaty of Tordesillas and renegotiate their territorial boundaries in South America on a more definitive basis (Riedinger, 2023).

Against this backdrop, on January 13, 1750, Portugal and Spain signed the Treaty of Madrid, an agreement that produced far-reaching historical and legal consequences for the Iberian nations. Representing Spain in the negotiations was José de Carvajal y Lancaster, Chief Minister of the Kingdom and President of the Council of the Indies. Portugal was represented by the Brazilian-born diplomat Alexandre de Gusmão, Secretary and Counselor to King John V of Portugal (Riedinger, 2023).

The Treaty of Madrid represented a significant milestone in the territorial organization of South America. Unlike the Treaty of Tordesillas, which had established an abstract geometric division based on a meridian, the new agreement sought to recognize the territorial realities that had emerged through exploration, settlement, and economic occupation over more than two centuries of colonial expansion. As a result, the treaty provided a legal framework for acknowledging the extensive Portuguese presence in territories situated west of the original Tordesillas line, thereby substantially expanding the territorial dimensions of Portuguese America.

Figure 4. Boundaries of Brazil: Tordesillas, Madrid, and the Current Administrative Division.



Source: IBGE (2017), Rosa and Jesus (2003), Presotti (2008) and Chaves (2014)

Alexandre de Gusmão, who also served as Secretary of the Overseas Council, guided the negotiations based on the Roman law principle *uti possidetis, ita possideatis*, meaning that “those who possess a territory in fact should possess it by right.” According to this principle, each party would retain ownership of the territories it effectively occupied. Another strategy employed by Gusmão involved the use of natural geographic features, such as rivers and mountain ranges, as boundary markers between areas occupied by settlers under the authority of the two crowns. In addition, the negotiations took into account the westward expansion of mining activities into the region of Mato Grosso and the Portuguese presence in the Río de la Plata basin, both of which conflicted with Spanish interests in South America (Silva; Bastos, 1976; Muradás, 2008).

Nevertheless, several other factors and historical developments contributed to the Portuguese expansion that progressively shifted the practical limits of the Tordesillas Line westward. Motivated by political

considerations and, above all, socioeconomic interests, Portuguese America gradually expanded into new territories from the sixteenth century through the first half of the eighteenth century. These processes of territorial enlargement ultimately extended Portuguese control far beyond the boundaries originally established by the Treaty of Tordesillas. Subsequently, the territorial realities resulting from this expansion were negotiated, recognized, and formally incorporated into the Treaty of Madrid of 1750 by the Iberian crowns. The principal events and developments that justified the Portuguese-Brazilian expansion into territories originally claimed by Spain are discussed in the following sections.

The Iberian Union (1580–1640)

The most significant political issue in Portugal at the end of the sixteenth century was the death of King Sebastian I in 1578 during the Battle of Alcácer Quibir, in present-day Morocco. Because he was unmarried and left no legitimate heir, Portugal faced a dynastic succession crisis. The throne was subsequently assumed by Cardinal Henry, Sebastian's great-uncle. However, he was unable to secure authorization from the Catholic Church to renounce his ecclesiastical vows and marry in order to produce a legitimate successor and ensure the continuity of the House of Avis. Upon his death in 1580, the Portuguese throne became vacant, triggering a succession dispute (Dornelles, 2011).

As a consequence of these dynastic issues, the solution adopted was the establishment of the Iberian Union in 1580 through the unification of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns. King Philip II of Spain sought to preserve Portugal's political identity, refraining from treating it as a conquered nation and instead presenting it as a kingdom united under the Spanish Crown. As a result, Portugal retained its status as a distinct nation. This arrangement was formalized through the Oath of Tomar (1581), a set of commitments undertaken by the Spanish monarchy that allowed Portugal to maintain control over trade with its colonies, preserve its laws, customs, and traditions, and retain authority over its public administration and colonial possessions (Chacon, 2010).

However, during the period of the Iberian Union, Portuguese-Brazilian occupation expanded into the Amazon and Río de la Plata basins, extending well beyond the territorial limits established by the Treaty of Tordesillas (Moraes, 1991). According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the union of the two crowns played a decisive role in the formation of Brazilian territory by effectively weakening the boundaries imposed by the Treaty of Tordesillas. This process facilitated territorial expansion westward, northward through the incorporation of Maranhão, and southward through the enlargement of frontier areas in the Río de la Plata region (IBGE, 2026).

In practical terms, the period between 1580 and 1640 resulted in the temporary suspension of the frontier established by the Treaty of Tordesillas, thereby enabling the territorial expansion of Colonial Brazil and significantly stimulating economic activities. This process encouraged the occupation and exploitation of new territories through cattle ranching and, subsequently, mining, both of which would play a fundamental role in the effective expansion and consolidation of Brazilian territory (Becker; Egler, 1994 apud Souza et al., 2024).

The Mining Cycle

Historically, the prospecting and exploitation of mineral resources have been directly associated with the colonization and occupation of the territory that now constitutes Brazil. One of the earliest documents related to the discovery of Brazil, the letter written by Pero Vaz de Caminha in May 1500, described the natural resources that attracted the interest of the Portuguese Crown and drew attention to the possible existence of mineral deposits:

In this land, thus far, we have not been able to determine whether there is gold, silver, or any kind of metal, nor have we seen iron; however, the land itself possesses excellent air, as mild and temperate as that between the Douro and Minho rivers. At this time of year, we found it comparable to those regions. Water is abundant and inexhaustible, and the land is so fertile that, if properly utilized, everything may flourish because of its plentiful waters. Yet, the greatest benefit that may be derived from it seems to me to be the conversion of its people, and this should be the principal endeavor that Your Highness should undertake. Even if there were no other advantage than serving as a stopover for the navigation route to Calicut, it would already be of considerable value, especially given its potential for fulfilling Your Highness's desire to promote and expand our Holy Catholic Faith (Abreu, 2009, p. 22; Castro, 1985 apud Menezes, 2011; Garcia; Bonfim, 2022).

The Portuguese interest in locating precious metals can also be observed in the *forais* and donation charters of the Hereditary Captaincies, as well as in the General Regiment of Tomé de Sousa, the first Governor-General of Brazil (1549–1553). These documents established the rights and obligations of colonial administrators, including the responsibility to organize expeditions into the interior in search of precious metals and other valuable resources (Menezes, 2011).

Beginning in the late seventeenth century, the decline of the sugar economy in northeastern Brazil, largely due to Dutch competition in the Caribbean, intensified the Portuguese Crown's interest in identifying mineral wealth within the colony. These expectations were eventually fulfilled. Gold was discovered by Antônio

Rodrigues Arzão in Cataguases, Minas Gerais, in 1693; by Antônio Dias de Oliveira in Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, in 1698; and by Borba Gato in Sabará, Minas Gerais, in 1700 (Silva; Bastos, 1976).

These discoveries played a fundamental role in Brazil's territorial formation by promoting the occupation and development of the interior regions of the colony. At the time, mining was an inherently urbanizing activity. Wherever mining operations were established, settlements and cities emerged, as gold production stimulated economic growth and attracted population flows (Moraes, 2001).

Furthermore, the discovery of gold fulfilled a long-standing Portuguese aspiration and helped alleviate the economic difficulties faced by Portugal, particularly its growing dependence on England. Gold extracted from the regions of Mato Grosso, Goiás, and especially Minas Gerais was transported to the port of Rio de Janeiro and subsequently exported to Portugal. During the first decade of the eighteenth century, significant diamond deposits were also discovered in the Jequitinhonha Valley (Silva; Bastos, 1976).

Between 1700 and 1770, Brazil is estimated to have produced approximately 50 percent of the world's total gold output, corresponding to nearly one thousand metric tons of gold and approximately three million carats of precious stones (Figueirôa, 1994). The discovery of these mineral resources attracted migrants from other regions of the colony as well as from Portugal, generating profound political, economic, and social transformations within the mining regions and fostering greater territorial integration. Not surprisingly, mining was largely responsible for the effective occupation and consolidation of the territories that now comprise the states of Minas Gerais, Goiás, and Mato Grosso (Fernandes; Araújo, 2016).

As new mineral wealth was uncovered, Salvador gradually lost its status as the principal economic center of the colony, while Rio de Janeiro emerged as the new dynamic core of colonial development. The transfer of the colonial capital from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro, formally enacted in 1763, reflected the inability of the government based in Bahia to administer effectively a colony whose principal economic, political, and financial activities had shifted southward (Brauer, 2009).

Under these circumstances, the mining cycle contributed significantly to the relocation of the colonial capital from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro. Among the factors that motivated this change were Rio de Janeiro's proximity to the mining districts and the strategic importance of its port, through which gold was exported to Portugal. As a result, the political, economic, and administrative center of Portuguese America shifted from the Northeast to the Southeast, a transformation that would have lasting consequences for Brazil's historical development (Silva; Bastos, 1976; Brauer, 2009).

The Cattle-Ranching Cycle

Cattle ranching played a significant role in the Brazilian economy and began to develop during the sixteenth century, approximately three decades after the onset of the colonization process. This activity exerted a substantial influence on economic growth, particularly through its contribution to supplying the domestic market (Teixeira; Hespanhol, 2014).

One of the principal factors responsible for the expansion of cattle raising into the interior of the country was the growth of mining activities in regions corresponding to the present-day states of Mato Grosso, Goiás, and Minas Gerais. The migration of populations to these mining areas created a growing consumer market for meat, milk, and leather products. Cowboys, ranch hands, and cattle owners played an important role in the territorial expansion of Brazil by opening routes, connecting production centers with consumer markets, and integrating the hinterland with the coastal regions. In addition, they facilitated the transportation of goods, the circulation of information and correspondence, and the establishment of permanent settlements throughout the interior (Medeiros Neto, 1970 apud Teixeira; Hespanhol, 2014).

Cattle ranching in northeastern Brazil also benefited from the discovery and exploitation of gold in the regions that today correspond to Minas Gerais, Goiás, and Mato Grosso during the final years of the seventeenth century. These mining districts generated a new regional market and stimulated demand for agricultural and livestock products. Since the mineral extraction zones were located in remote inland areas far from the Atlantic coast, supplying these regions encouraged the development of new markets in the central and southern provinces of the colony (Simonsen, 2005 apud Luna; Klein, 2023).

As one of the principal economic activities developed in the interior, cattle ranching played a crucial role in sustaining the colony. It was also instrumental in the emergence of important economic centers and contributed significantly to the formation of urban settlements. Territorial expansion was therefore closely associated with livestock production, highlighting the central role of cattle ranching in shaping the spatial organization of Colonial Brazil (Freitas, 2014 apud Souza et al., 2024).

The Southern Region, for example, became particularly prominent in cattle production. Since the colonial period, livestock raising served as the foundation of the regional economy, supported by extensive natural grasslands that favored the rapid multiplication of herds compared with other regions of the colony (Adas, 1983 apud Teixeira; Hespanhol, 2014). One activity that further stimulated cattle ranching was the emergence of *charqueadas* (salted-beef processing establishments). In 1793, Rio Grande do Sul exported approximately 13,000

arrobas of *charque* (dried and salted beef), and during the first years of the nineteenth century, exports had increased to approximately 600,000 arrobas (Prado Júnior, 1987 apud Teixeira; Hespanhol, 2014).

Thus, territorial expansion was driven not only by the search for mineral wealth, such as gold and silver, but also by the need to broaden the colony's economic base through activities such as cattle ranching, which transformed the interior into an area of considerable economic importance. This process of expansion was characterized by occupation strategies that frequently disregarded the territorial limits established by the Treaty of Tordesillas, contributing significantly to the enlargement and consolidation of Portuguese America (Souza et al., 2024).

The Cycle of the *Drogas do Sertão*

In 1615, Francisco Caldeira Castelo Branco founded the Forte do Presépio, the site that would later become the city of Belém, in the present-day state of Pará. This event marked the beginning of Portuguese penetration into the Amazon region through navigation along the Amazon River (Silva; Bastos, 1976). In 1637, Portugal organized an expedition led by Pedro Teixeira, who traveled from Pará toward Peru and formally claimed possession of a vast portion of the Amazon Basin. As a result, the territorial limits established by the Treaty of Tordesillas were effectively surpassed (França, 2005).

At that time, the Portuguese and Spanish crowns were united under the Iberian Union, enabling Portugal to expand westward and incorporate an enormous territory (Figure 4), with the notable exception of Acre, which would only become part of Brazilian territory in 1903 (Porto-Gonçalves, 2015 apud Venâncio; Chelotti, 2023).

The principal economic attraction of the Amazon region during this period was the exploitation of the *drogas do sertão*, a term used to describe a variety of medicinal, aromatic, and commercial forest products that were comparable in value to Asian spices. These resources were collected primarily by Indigenous peoples, often in close collaboration with religious missionaries operating throughout the region (Silva; Bastos, 1976).

The Portuguese Crown encouraged and financed expeditions into the Amazon rainforest, where explorers identified natural products that could serve as alternatives to the highly valued spices previously imported through Eastern trade routes (Donini; Santos, 2017). Among the most common and commercially important products were clove bark (*Dicypellium caryophyllaceum*), cacao (*Theobroma cacao* L.), annatto (*Bixa orellana* L.), cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum* J. Presl), copaiba (*Copaifera* spp.), vanilla (*Vanilla* spp.), indigo (*Indigofera* spp.), sarsaparilla (*Smilax* spp.), and puxuri (*Licaria puchury-major* (Mart.) Kosterm.) (Oliveira, 1983).

The conquest and occupation of the Amazon Valley were fundamentally supported by regional natural resources, particularly the wide variety of products offered by the rainforest that could be extracted and traded commercially. Consequently, the colonial economy of the region remained strongly based on an extractive production model, which constituted the foundation of virtually all economic activity in the Amazon during this period (Rezende, 2006).

The role of the *sertanistas* was crucial in the penetration of the Amazon region and the exploitation of the *drogas do sertão*. Their activities significantly contributed to territorial expansion beyond the boundaries originally established by the Treaty of Tordesillas (Carneiro, 2013; Rezende, 2006 apud Souza et al., 2024). Through these efforts, Portugal secured control over a substantial portion of a region characterized by extraordinary ecological richness and biodiversity, corresponding largely to what is now known as the Brazilian Legal Amazon. Simultaneously, the colonization of the region facilitated the incorporation of numerous plant species into the medical and culinary knowledge systems of the colonial world (Marques, 1999 apud Donini; Santos, 2017).

As a result, Portuguese incursions into the Amazon led the Crown to intensify the occupation and exploitation of this vast territory. Religious missionaries played a central role in organizing economic enterprises and colonial settlements, frequently relying on Indigenous labor to sustain these activities (Rezende, 2006 apud Souza et al., 2024).

Finally, from a strictly geographical perspective, Spain could arguably have claimed sovereignty over much of the Amazon territory, since the entire region was situated west of the meridian established by the Treaty of Tordesillas (França, 2005). Nevertheless, the effective Portuguese occupation and administration of the area ultimately strengthened Portugal's position during subsequent territorial negotiations, particularly those that culminated in the Treaty of Madrid in 1750.

The Bandeirante Expeditions

The *Bandeiras* were exploratory expeditions organized primarily by settlers from the Captaincy of São Vicente. Initially, these expeditions were intended to combat foreign incursions into Portuguese territories. Over time, however, their objectives shifted toward the capture and enslavement of Indigenous peoples and the search for gold mines and precious stones. The *bandeirantes* took advantage of Brazil's extensive river network,

Brazil's Mineral Wealth and Diversity

The importance of mineral resources in Brazil dates back to the colonial period. The expeditions undertaken by the *bandeirantes* in search of precious metals shaped the occupation of Brazil's interior and culminated in the exploitation of gold deposits, initially concentrated in the region of Minas Gerais. Throughout Brazilian history, as territorial expansion progressed and geological knowledge advanced, new mineral deposits were discovered, significantly influencing the national economy and fostering the country's industrialization process (ANM, 2024a).

As previously discussed, the history of Brazil was profoundly influenced by two major political and diplomatic milestones that left a lasting legacy within the nation's material patrimony. With specific regard to mineral resources, the Treaties of Tordesillas and Madrid contributed decisively to the formation of a territory that today contains a remarkable diversity of mineral deposits, including strategic and critical minerals as well as rare earth elements.

These minerals are widely recognized as indispensable to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) and irreplaceable in the global energy transition. They serve as essential inputs for the production of advanced technologies, high-value goods, and sophisticated industrial systems. Consequently, countries that possess substantial reserves of these resources, such as Brazil, may benefit from significant economic, industrial, and technological advantages.

Brazil is internationally recognized as a leading producer and exporter of mineral commodities, particularly metallic minerals. The country stands out for its production of iron ore, copper, gold, aluminum, and niobium. According to the *Brazilian Mineral Yearbook 2020* (Base Year 2019), exports of Brazil's principal metallic minerals reached a total value of approximately US\$48.64 billion, with China and the United States representing the primary export destinations (ANM, 2020 apud Castro; Peiter; Góes, 2022).

Owing to the diversity and abundance of its mineral reserves, Brazil occupies a favorable position to become a major player in the global mineral market. This resource wealth, combined with the country's geopolitical stability and strong export-oriented profile, enhances its attractiveness as a strategic partner for major powers seeking to diversify their mineral supply chains (Karas, 2025). In pursuit of both domestic supply security and greater participation in international markets, the Federal Government has identified the expansion of national mineral production as a strategic priority, emphasizing the existence of substantial reserves with significant economic potential (Brasil, 2022).

In accordance with the primary objective of this study, the information presented below illustrates the extent to which Brazil currently possesses a rich and diverse portfolio of mineral resources, largely attributable to the territorial legacy resulting from the two major diplomatic agreements previously examined.

Thus, even before its official discovery in 1500, Brazil inherited a territory that would later prove to contain extensive mineral deposits. Subsequent geological surveys and mineral exploration activities have identified significant reserves distributed across numerous states of the federation (Karas, 2025; IBRAM, 2025).

Table 1. Brazilian Mineral Resources Located in the Northeast Region.

State	Mineral Resources
Bahia	• Copper and nickel (<i>Vale do Curaçá</i>); • Gold (<i>Rio Itapicuru</i> and <i>Jabonia</i>); • Nickel, vanadium, and titanium in the municipalities of <i>Maracás</i> and <i>Itagibá</i>; and • Graphite.
Ceará	• Lithium.
Minas Gerais	• Iron, gold, and manganese (<i>Quadrilátero Ferrífero</i>); • Niobium (<i>Araxá</i>); • Gold, zinc, and lead (<i>Vazante</i> and <i>Paracatu</i>); • Lithium and graphite (<i>Jequitinhonha Valley</i>); and • Rare Earth Elements.
Goiás	• Copper and gold (<i>Mara Rosa</i>); • Nickel (<i>Niquelândia</i>); • Nickel and aluminum (<i>Barro Alto</i>); • Phosphate (<i>Catalão</i>); and • Tin and Rare Earth Elements (<i>Serra Dourada</i>).

Source: IBRAM (2025) and Karas (2025).

The Northeast Region hosts active projects involving nickel, copper, iron, and lithium, in addition to a cobalt-related venture and natural graphite mines in the state of Bahia. This territorial distribution highlights the region's geological diversity and reinforces Brazil's potential to integrate global value chains, contributing to the energy transition, technological innovation, and sustainable development based on its strategic mineral resources (CEBRI, 2025).

Nickel occurrences are found in several Northeastern states. Between 2019 and 2023, approximately BRL 63.8 million was invested in mineral exploration activities across the states of Bahia, Ceará, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, and Sergipe, demonstrating significant interest in the prospecting of new mineralized areas (Bezerra, 2025). In 2024, the total value of phosphate mineral production reached BRL 4.10 billion, of which the Northeast Region accounted for BRL 0.22 billion (5.4%). Bahia was the only phosphate-producing state in the region, where Mineração Vale do Araguaia exploited a sedimentary phosphate deposit in the municipality of Irecê (Bezerra, 2025).

In Southeastern Brazil, the *Quadrilátero Ferrífero* and the carbonatite district of Araxá, both located in the state of Minas Gerais, stand out as major mineral-producing areas. In the Central-West Region, particularly in northern Goiás, important operations involving nickel, bauxite, and rare earth elements are prominent. Furthermore, the Jequitinhonha Valley, also located in Minas Gerais, has emerged as a new strategic mineral hub, driven by the expansion of lithium extraction activities. This concentration of mineral projects reflects not only the favorable geological conditions of these regions but also their advanced logistical and industrial infrastructure (CEBRI, 2025).

The Brazilian Mining Institute (IBRAM) has mapped a broad range of mineral deposits that constitute part of the country's mineral endowment. Specifically, within the portions of territory incorporated into Brazil through westward territorial expansion and subsequently recognized by the Treaty of Madrid, the following mineral resources stand out (IBRAM, 2025):

Table 2. Brazilian Mineral Resources Located in the North and Central-West Regions.

State	Mineral Resources
Pará	• <i>Carajás</i> (iron, copper, manganese, gold, and nickel); • <i>Oriximiná</i>, <i>Paragominas</i>, and <i>Juruti</i> (aluminum); and • <i>Tapajós</i> (gold and Rare Earth Elements).
Mato Grosso	• <i>Juruena</i> and <i>Teles Pires</i> (gold); • <i>Baixada Cuiabana</i> and <i>Upper Guaporé</i> (gold); • <i>Aripuanã</i> (zinc and copper); and • <i>Upper Jauru</i> (copper, gold, lead, and zinc).
Rondônia	• Tin (cassiterite) and manganese production.
Amazonas	• Tin, niobium, and tantalum.

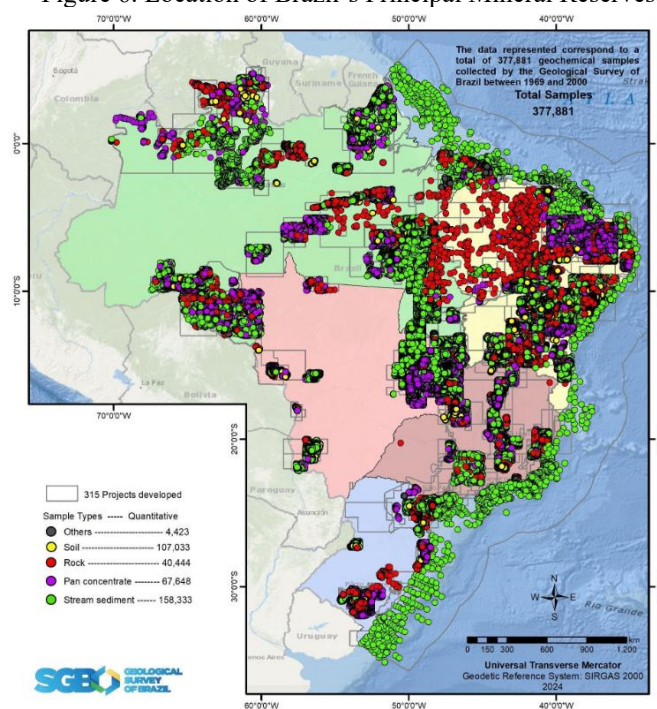
Source: IBRAM (2025).

It is also important to emphasize that the North Region hosts major mining operations integrated into Brazil's export corridors, notably the Carajás and Porto Trombetas complexes, both located in the state of Pará. These operations are primarily dedicated to the production and export of iron ore, copper, and bauxite, reinforcing the strategic importance of the region within global mineral supply chains (CEBRI, 2025).

The state of Mato Grosso, a territory fully incorporated into Brazil through the implementation of the Treaty of Madrid (Figure 4), has historically been an important producer of gold and, during certain periods, has also played a prominent role in the diamond market. In 2021, the state generated approximately BRL 73 million in tax revenues, representing nearly 18% of the national total derived from gold mining activities. Mato Grosso accounted for approximately 15% of Brazil's gold production, ranking as the third-largest gold-producing state in the country (ANM, 2021 apud Garcia; Bonfim, 2022).

These examples illustrate how territories incorporated into Brazil as a result of the westward expansion formally recognized by the Treaty of Madrid became repositories of substantial mineral wealth. Today, these regions continue to play a strategic role in the national mining sector, contributing significantly to exports, industrial development, technological advancement, and Brazil's participation in global supply chains for critical and strategic minerals.

Figure 6. Location of Brazil's Principal Mineral Reserves.



Source: SGB (2025).

A more detailed analysis of Figure 6 reveals Brazil's prominent position as a holder of significant mineral reserves, with considerable potential to play a strategic role in the global energy transition. The country's supply of these minerals may expand further in the coming years as a result of the discovery of new resources, the development of additional reserves, and increased production capacity (CEBRI, 2025).

In the twenty-first century, concerns associated with global warming and the consolidation of the energy transition as a central component of both climate and industrial agendas have profoundly transformed the geopolitical and commercial landscape of critical minerals. Minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper, graphite, and rare earth elements have been widely recognized as essential for the manufacture of low-carbon technologies, including batteries, wind turbines, solar panels, electric motors, and energy storage systems (IEA, 2022 apud Karas, 2025).

Within this context, Brazil has emerged on the international stage as a country with substantial potential to contribute to the global supply of these strategic resources. Its territory contains extensive mineral reserves that remain only partially explored, particularly lithium deposits in the states of Minas Gerais and Ceará; nickel reserves in Goiás and Bahia; copper deposits in Pará, especially in the Carajás region; and promising occurrences of rare earth elements in Minas Gerais and Amazonas (ANM, 2024b apud Karas, 2025).

This scenario is further reinforced by the advent of Industry 4.0, a concept encompassing the integration of advanced digital technologies into manufacturing processes, including artificial intelligence, automation, the Internet of Things, big data analytics, and cloud computing. The implementation of this technological revolution depends upon the availability of specific raw materials, among which rare earth elements occupy a particularly strategic position. More than mere mineral inputs, these elements are considered indispensable because of the critical role they play in advanced technologies used across sectors such as energy, defense, healthcare, transportation, and communications (Oliveira, 2025).

Consequently, there is substantial evidence that Brazil possesses the capacity to assume a prominent role within this evolving global framework. With significant mineral reserves distributed across states such as Minas Gerais, Amazonas, Bahia, Goiás, and Pará, the country holds an exceptionally valuable geological endowment (Oliveira, 2025).

Today, as a direct consequence of the territorial foundation largely consolidated during the eighteenth century, Brazil's mining sector constitutes an important source of foreign exchange earnings for the national economy. In 2020, the sector generated a trade surplus of approximately US\$28 billion, representing 54% of the positive trade balance of the Brazilian economy as a whole. In addition to niobium, a segment in which Companhia Brasileira de Metalurgia e Mineração (CBMM) maintains global leadership, Brazil possesses proven reserves of rare earth elements, vanadium, tantalum, bauxite, graphite, and several other strategic minerals. The development of these deposits has the potential to integrate the country into high-value-added industrial chains,

generating skilled employment opportunities and fostering technological advancement throughout the twenty-first century (Brasil, 2025).

Therefore, it may be partially concluded that Brazil has emerged in the twenty-first century as one of the world's most significant holders of mineral resources. In a global context in which these materials are indispensable for the production of high-technology goods, services, and industrial systems, and irreplaceable in low-carbon development pathways, Brazil's privileged position can be traced to the territorial foundation established initially during the fifteenth century through the Treaty of Tordesillas and subsequently expanded through a long process of inland occupation that culminated in the eighteenth century with the signing of the Treaty of Madrid. This territorial legacy provided the country with a vast and diversified mineral endowment that continues to underpin its strategic importance in the contemporary global economy.

IV. Final Considerations

Portugal and Spain were the pioneering nations of the Age of Exploration that characterized the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These maritime enterprises, which contributed to the emergence of Mercantilism, were only possible because the Iberian crowns decided to explore the Atlantic Ocean. The outcomes were remarkable: Portuguese and Castilian caravels and ships reached the markets of the Indies, surpassing the commercial dominance of Mediterranean Italian merchants, establishing new maritime routes, and exploring previously unknown territories.

In addition to reaching the Indian Ocean by navigating around the southern tip of Africa, another achievement that profoundly transformed world history was the discovery of the Americas, an entire continent that was initially colonized by Portugal and Spain. The discovery of Brazil must be understood within this broader historical context.

Disputes over overseas colonial territories between the two Iberian crowns compelled them to establish boundary agreements at a time when both kingdoms sought to exploit the natural resources of their overseas possessions in order to strengthen economic development in Europe.

It was within this context that the Treaties of Tordesillas and Madrid emerged as central diplomatic instruments. The Treaty of Tordesillas was signed before Brazil had even been discovered, yet it granted Portugal control over the eastern portion of the South American continent. By the time the Treaty of Madrid was negotiated, a series of political and diplomatic factors (the Iberian Union), economic dynamics (the mining, backlands products, and cattle-raising cycles), and socioeconomic developments (the Bandeirante expeditions) enabled the Brazilian-born diplomat Alexandre de Gusmão to invoke the Roman legal principle *uti possidetis, ita possideatis* ("as you possess, so may you continue to possess"), thereby securing a substantial territorial expansion for the Portuguese colony.

As a result, by the end of the eighteenth century, Brazil had acquired a territorial configuration that closely resembled its present-day borders, inheriting a vast and diverse array of natural resources. In the twenty-first century, Brazil, internationally recognized as a continental-scale nation, has also emerged as a major holder of mineral resources at a time when such materials are indispensable for the production of high-technology goods and services and irreplaceable in low-carbon technologies associated with the global energy transition.

Accordingly, this study sought to analyze how the Treaties of Tordesillas and Madrid, negotiated between Portugal and Spain, contributed to the formation of Brazil's extensive and diversified mineral resource base and to examine the implications of this territorial legacy in the twenty-first century. Through this analysis, the study provides insights that may support political, economic, and scientific-technological institutions in understanding how Brazilian history can contribute to raising awareness and prioritizing public policies aimed at the effective national management of the country's mineral resources.

The findings demonstrate that the research objectives were achieved by providing a comprehensive understanding of how the vast mineral wealth present in Brazil's subsoil can generate economic, industrial, and technological benefits. Beyond its role as a producer and exporter of mineral commodities, Brazil possesses the potential to become a strategic actor in both the global energy transition and the production of advanced technological goods and services, strengthening its mineral-industrial base for the benefit of both the nation and the international market.

The study also highlights the importance of History as a discipline capable of fostering critical thinking by enabling comparisons between past events and contemporary realities. In this sense, historical analysis serves as a valuable tool for interpreting the past, understanding the present, and contributing to the construction of future perspectives.

Accordingly, the research successfully addressed the following question: *When Brazil emerged as an independent nation in 1822, did it possess mineral resources capable of fostering its economy and supporting its development, particularly in the twenty-first century?*

The qualitative approach, based on a literature review and documentary analysis, proved fundamental in demonstrating how the Treaties of Tordesillas and Madrid provided Brazil with a territorial foundation that

enabled the country to benefit from its mineral wealth and diversity, thereby contributing to national economic and industrial development.

Finally, future studies are encouraged to examine the strengths and opportunities for improvement within Brazil's domestic mineral sector, as well as the opportunities and challenges arising from the international environment, in order to better understand the country's position and prospects within the global mineral market.

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