

Maritime Strategy & Security Challenges in South America

Regional Effects and Global Impacts

Abstract

Maritime Security is a globally linked system, which is of immediate importance for both land-locked and coastal states. Due to this international character, security challenges in a certain area always influence all parties of the globalized society. While western research mainly focuses on the North Atlantic and European region, and more recently the Asian and Indo-Pacific region, maritime challenges in South America are often left unconsidered. Especially European research and strategy fails to focus on the area, while Russia, China or the US are already recognizing the importance of Maritime Security in Latin America. This book will focus on Maritime Strategy and the challenges to Maritime Security that States in South America are facing and to what extent these influence European and global Maritime Security. The concept of this anthology originates from the conference series “Americas Series” hosted by the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University in 2021, which focused on Maritime Challenges from an American perspective.

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Foreword

Henrik Schilling

The international community is deeply reliant on the maritime domain. For generations, the sea has sustained humanity and shaped its evolution. It serves as a foundation for transport, communication, and resource extraction, forming the backbone of modern civilization. As the primary enabler of globalization, the maritime domain brings both significant benefits and notable challenges. It is striking, therefore, how little we truly understand about this vast realm, which covers approximately 70% of our planet.

This lack of knowledge extends beyond geographical aspects, such as the limited availability of mapping data or our incomplete understanding of subsea environments and the seabed. It also applies to the socio-economic, political, and cultural dynamics of maritime activities, which can give rise to security challenges that ripple across the globe. The blockage of the Suez Canal in 2021 starkly illustrated the risks associated with disruptions to sea lines of communication: an estimated ten billion USD worth of cargo was delayed each day for nearly a week. The total costs and long-term impact on the global economy remain uncertain. While this event served as a wake-up call for some, the issue of "sea blindness" persists.

At first glance, this widespread lack of awareness might seem surprising. However, upon reflection, it is perhaps inevitable. Standing on the beach at the edge of the Kiel Fjord, one might see a few sailboats and cargo ships. What dominates the view, however, is the vast, seemingly empty expanse of the Baltic Sea. To the untrained observer, it is difficult to grasp how densely utilized this region truly is. In the southern Baltic, nearly every square meter is affected by human activity – be it shipping routes, subsea cables and pipelines, military training zones, ammunition dumps from World War II, offshore wind farms, or nature reserves.

Similarly, few people consider for example the maritime journey their mobile phone underwent before reaching them, traversing the globe's choke points or even piracy-infested waters. This lack of awareness is understandable; the sea has always been, and will likely remain, a vast unknown. Nevertheless, ignoring its importance represents a dangerous oversight, given the sea's role as a critical enabler of global growth and prosperity.

Through our Seapower Series, we aim to combat this "sea blindness" by fostering greater maritime awareness. Our initiative brings together naval experts to discuss pressing issues of the past, present, and future. After all, "knowledge is power," but it only becomes meaningful when shared. This requires openness to new perspectives and issues that extend beyond one's daily focus.

It was with this mindset that we organized the Americas Series – an online conference format – during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2020 and early 2021. What began as a simple idea quickly grew into five sessions featuring ten distinguished speakers. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, maritime challenges also transcend borders and actors. A single maritime phenomenon often affects multiple countries and regions, as exemplified by the Suez Canal incident. Such interdependencies heighten the vulnerability of global systems and underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of maritime risks – not only nationally but globally.

South America, one of the continents geographically furthest from Europe, has largely fallen out of focus for many. This is surprising, given its significant impact on Europe, such as the flow of drugs originating from the continent. While drug trafficking is perhaps the most recognized maritime security issue in South America, it is far from the only challenge the region faces – many of which have global implications.

This recognition motivated us to conduct a fact-finding mission to identify key maritime security topics in South America. Importantly, our goal was to engage with the Americas, not merely speak about them. To that end, we invited speakers from the region to share their perspectives on their primary security concerns. The same principle guided the development of this book.

We are thrilled to present this collection of diverse contributions from authors intrinsically connected to their topics. The authors represent a variety of backgrounds, including university students, recent doctoral graduates, and seasoned professors, as well as retired generals and active service members. To avoid framing South America's issues solely through a European lens, we minimized editorial constraints, offering only basic format guidelines and broad questions. This allowed each author to express their unique insights and perspectives.

It is my privilege to guide the reader through the topics explored in this book. But first, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my colleagues, superiors, and the ISPK for entrusting my co-editor and me with this project. Their confidence in two early-career researchers to lead and publish this endeavor is deeply appreciated. I would also like to thank Dr. Andrea Resende for her helpful support in the planning and execution of the project, for her commitment as a link to our many Latin and South American authors, and for her valuable assistance in editing the contributions. Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to all the contributing authors, whose time, effort, and expertise have enriched this seventh edition of the Seapower Series.

This edited volume uses a three folded approach to the topic of maritime security in South America. While not claiming to be exhaustive, it aims to provide broad coverage of the challenges surrounding maritime security in the region. The first section comprises five chapters that take a strategic perspective on the subject matter.

Wilder Alejandro Sanchez opens the volume with an overview of the current state of South American navies, their missions, and their challenges. He highlights the diverse operational areas – both thematically and geographically – of these navies and reveals significant differences among countries in terms of fleet size, equipment, and capabilities. Despite ongoing shipbuilding projects, most South American navies face chronic underfunding, which, given the vastness of their operational areas and the range of challenges they confront, limits their effectiveness.

Similar issues affect the Brazilian Navy, the largest in South America, which finds itself in a difficult position due to its international ambitions and insufficient budget. Andrea Resende's chapter explores Brazil's naval strategy, current projects, and future aspirations. Unlike most South American navies, the Brazilian Navy frequently participates in international operations, such as the UNIFIL mission off the coast of Lebanon and anti-piracy operations near the Horn of Africa or the Gulf of Guinea. Through these efforts, Brazil seeks to expand its international influence while reinforcing its role as the leading maritime power in the region.

South America plays a significant role in the global geopolitical landscape, shaped by diverse historical influences. Ralph Espach examines how European colonial powers and later the United States have impacted the continent's maritime affairs, as well as the role South America now plays in the contemporary Great Power Competition. The United States' relatively brief period of dominance was only partially linked to hopes of prosperity. With waning American interest, South American nations have sought to strengthen their positions as independent global actors. Increasing Chinese investment, particularly in infrastructure projects, has further influenced the maritime foreign and security policies of several countries in the region.

Shifting from a global perspective to a regional one, the final two chapters of the first section offer insights from North America's immediate neighbors into maritime security challenges in South America. James Howe and Bill Travis outline the role of the United States Coast Guard, which cooperates closely with the navies of several South American countries. In recent years, regional and international anti-drug trafficking operations, carried out jointly with local naval forces, have been a

central focus. With a personnel force larger than most South American navies, the U.S. Coast Guard plays a vital role in ensuring the maritime security of the United States as well as the broader Americas.

As part of the Eastern Pacific Drug Vector, Mexico is directly affected by drug cultivation and trafficking from South America. In his chapter, Christian Ehrlich analyzes the resulting challenges for Mexico and its interconnectedness with southern neighbors. He also addresses other maritime issues facing the country, such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which have shaped Mexico's maritime strategy and naval development. Mexico's challenges mirror those faced by many South American states, making a comparative perspective a fitting conclusion to this first section.

[Still in progress, waiting for final chapter]

Maritime Strategy Issues

South American Navies: The Present and the Future of the Fleets

Wilder Alejandro Sanchez

South American Navies are evolving; while the mission of protecting a country's national sovereignty, including its maritime territory, remains the same, maritime security threats change, and the suppliers of naval platforms are becoming more domestic-oriented. This analysis will discuss the status of South America's fleets, focusing on who are the providers of new surface and underwater platforms, and how the region's inter-state relations affect strategic thinking and future acquisition programs.

South America's security threats and other Naval operations

South American countries do not fight each other often; the last inter-state conflict in Latin America was the 1995 War between Ecuador and Peru. Interestingly, this conflict was exclusively fought on land and in the air; the navies of the two belligerents did not participate. The last war in which a South American navy was an active combatant was the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War between Argentina and the United Kingdom.¹ In other words, over four decades have passed since a South American warship or submarine fired at another. While it is true that there have been occasional tensions and incidents since then, like the 1987 incident involving the corvette *ARC Caldas* (FM-52) in the Gulf of Venezuela, thankfully, another war has not occurred.²

So what are Navies doing today? Standard duties include patrol operations, maintaining operational readiness and serving as a deterrent to any potential aggressor. Additionally, navies actively combat drug trafficking, smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU).³ When a catastrophe occurs, South American navies are heavily involved in Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Response (HA/DR) operations, including search-and-rescue (SAR) and medical evacuations (MEDEVAC). The assistance includes transporting medical supplies, food, and other emergency equipment to affected areas; vessels can also serve as hospital ships, if necessary.

This essay has two caveats. First, this analysis will not include Bolivia and Paraguay, South America's landlocked nations. Both countries have navies; however, this essay will focus on countries that have Ocean access. Similarly, this essay will not discuss Guyana and Suriname; while these two countries are geographically located in South America, they are generally considered part of the Caribbean. Second, this essay will focus on sea operations by South American navies. This is an important clarification as countries like Brazil, Colombia, and Peru have many rivers and lakes (e.g., Lake Titicaca, which Peru shares with Bolivia). Regional navies are very active across South American rivers, including operations against drug trafficking, IUU fishing, smuggling, and they also engage in

1 *Sánchez*, "Whatever happened to South America's splendid little wars?"

2 In August 1987, the *Caldas* sailed into the Gulf of Venezuela, an area Bogota and Caracas claim. The situation escalated as Venezuela deployed frigates, submarines, and F-16 warplanes, while the Colombian Navy supported the *Caldas* by deploying ships like the frigate *ARC Independiente*. Ultimately, then-Colombian President Virgilio Barco ordered the Colombian warships to leave the contested areas. No shots were reportedly fired, and there were no casualties. *Sánchez*, "*La Crisis de la corbeta Caldas*."

3 IUU fishing occurs at three levels: a. Domestic: Fishing vessels from country "A" fish without authorization within the waters of their own home country; b. International: Fishing vessels of country "A" sail across borders and operate in the waters of neighboring country "B"; c. Extra-regional: Massive fishing fleets from countries like China or Spain cross the Atlantic/Pacific and operate across South American waters, often fishing within the exclusive economic zone of South American states.

environmental protection and social assistance missions.⁴ While these operations are vital, this essay will exclusively discuss Oceanic operations due to space considerations.

Current trends

This analysis primarily identifies two trends:

A. **Multipurpose is better:** South American navies are acquiring multipurpose transport vessels: they can be utilized during wartime to transport troops, ammunition, or combat vehicles and during peacetime for HA/DR missions.

Similarly, oceanic patrol vessels (OPVs) are a growing trend. While not as powerful as a frigate or destroyer, these vessels can be useful in an inter-state conflict. Similarly, these ships are very beneficial in combating drug trafficking, IUU fishing and other maritime crimes. One quality that makes OPVs popular is that they carry helicopters and rigid inflatable boats (RIBs). In other words, if all assets are deployed, one OPV can quickly turn into a small fleet of three or four aerial & maritime units, ideal for ISR missions to locate and intercept suspicious vessels, like the famous go-fast narco-speedboats or narco-submarines.⁵

B. **Homemade is preferable:** Nowadays, it is common that a South American shipyard, often state-run, will team up with an extra-regional shipyard to build platforms jointly; transferring "know-how" has become a critical component of shipbuilding contracts. In some cases, ships will be exclusively built in a South American shipyard, based on the design of an extra-regional company, or with limited assistance. Several recent partnerships demonstrate this trend: Damen and Colombia's COTECMAR will build a fleet of frigates;⁶ the Tamandaré-class frigates/corvettes for Brazil are under construction by the Águas Azuis consortium, composed of Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) and Brazil's EMBRAER and EMGEPRON;⁷ and Peru's state-run SIMA shipyard has teamed up with South Korea's Hyundai Heavy Industries to manufacture one frigate, one OPV and two Landing Craft Units (LCUs).⁸

In recent years, South American navies rely less on extra-regional providers when it comes to the construction of specific types of vessels. Coastal Patrol Vessels (CPVs) and even Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) can be built by shipyards in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. In fact, COTECMAR commenced construction of a 93 meter long OPV in late March 2021; according to the corporation, "[the OPV] is the first [ship] developed and designed by a Latin American shipyard, which represents a milestone for COTECMAR and the shipbuilding and naval industry."⁹ In other words, regional shipyards are now developing their own designs for future ships.

Additionally, regional shipyards are now turning to larger, more ambitious projects. For example, Peru's SIMA built the tall-mast training ship BAP *Union* (BEV-161),¹⁰ and Colombia's COTECMAR built the largest ship in Colombia, the oceanographic science vessel ARC *Simón Bolívar* (151).¹¹ Regional shipyards are even developing Antarctic vessels. Chile's ASMAR manufactured icebreaker

4 *Sánchez*, "Naval Operations across South American Rivers"

5 These vessels are not fully submersible, hence a term like low-profile vessels is more adequate, however "narco sub" has become a catchier name.

6 COTECMAR, "Cotecmar y Damen firman contrato"

7 Thyssenkrupp, "Tamandaré frigate keel laying marks innovation in military shipbuilding in Brazil"

8 Naval News, "Peru Selects HD HHI for Frigate, OPV and Landing Craft Units"

9 COTECMAR, "Cotecmar inicia construcción de la Patrullera Oceánica Colombiana"

10 El Comercio, "El buque Unión ya integra la flota naval del Perú"

11 Lopez Plazas, "ARC Simón Bolívar"

Almirante Viel, which was commissioned in 2024,¹² while the Brazilian shipyard EMGEPRON commenced the construction of a polar vessel for the Navy in October 2023.¹³

Moreover, Brazil's famous submarine-manufacturing program (PROSUB) exemplifies the technological knowledge and capabilities South American shipyards enjoy today. Peru's SIMA is also taking the next step of its evolution: in November 2024, in the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Lima, the Peruvian government and HHI signed a memorandum of understanding for the development of submarines. Perhaps encouraged by Brazil's success, Peru now wants to also manufacture subs.¹⁴ Without a doubt, regional navies will continue to rely on extra-regional suppliers via sales or donations; however, domestic is preferable and an option for several services.

As for donations, they continue to be critical components for some Navies with limited resources; simultaneously, they are a way for the suppliers to develop defense relations with South American militaries. One good example is South Korea. In recent years, South Korea has donated decommissioned vessels (either from the Navy or Korean Coast Guard) to Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay.¹⁵ For Seoul, a long-term objective may be to sell their more advanced warships and other vessels to South American clients or cement cooperation between South Korean and South American shipyards to jointly build platforms together, like Peru's SIMA and HHI.

In addition, the United States continues to provide defense equipment to allies across Latin America and the Caribbean. For example, in November 2022, the Uruguayan Navy commissioned three Protector-class patrol boats, previously operated by the US Coast Guard, which Washington donated.¹⁶ For the United States, the donation to Uruguay is arguably less aimed at future sales of platforms and more oriented towards strengthening the Uruguayan Navy's capabilities to combat maritime threats that Washington is also interested in (e.g., IUU fishing or drug smuggling).¹⁷

The status of the fleets today

This section will address the status and readiness of South America's fleets today.

Argentina (Armada Argentina) is in a problematic situation. This reality is quite unfortunate as, before the Falklands/Malvinas war, the South American country operated one of the region's most powerful fleets including a carrier, the *ARA 25 de Mayo* (V-2). In 2017, the Argentine Navy (Armada Argentina) lost the submarine *ARA San Juan* (S-42) in a tragic accident.¹⁸ The service has two other submarines; one has been undergoing major repairs for several years, *ARA Santa Cruz* (S-41), while *ARA Salta* (S-31), built in the early 1970s, is on water but probably not seaworthy. The service operates a fleet of *Almirante Brown*-class MEKO 360 destroyers, *Espora*-class MEKO 140 corvettes, and *Drummond*-class corvettes.

12 MercoPress, "Flamante rompehielos chileno recibe su bandera de combate,"

13 Goncalves "Primeiro navio polar construído no Brasil já gerou 600 empregos diretos e 6 mil indiretos,"

14 Defense News, "South Korea's HD HHI to Develop Submarine with Peru,"

15 El Comercio, "Dos lanchas guardacostas donadas por Corea del Sur llegaron a Ecuador," Also see: *Gestión*, "Armada peruana incorpora la corbeta Guise, donada por Corea del Sur," Also see: *El Colombiano*, "Conozca el navío que Corea del Sur regaló a la Armada colombiana," Also see: Bonilla, "La Armada Uruguay recibe un navio Clase Chamsuri"

16 Ministry of Defense (Uruguay), "Tres guardacostas Protector se incorporaron a la Armada, iniciando proceso de renovación y fortalecimiento"

17 While this analysis focuses on South America, it is important to note that the US Navy and US Southern Command have awarded the US shipyard Metal Shark a contract to build a fleet of Near Coastal Patrol Vessels (NCPVs) for Central American and Caribbean US partners. This is another example of Washington donating naval equipment so it can be utilized to combat crimes like drug-trafficking in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, which is a US interest.

18 The wreck of the submarine was found a year later, in 2018. All 44 souls aboard were lost

In the past five years, only limited acquisitions have been carried out. Specifically, between 2021-2022, the service obtained four Gowind-class offshore patrol vessels from France's Naval Group.¹⁹ The vessels have already been deployed to patrol Argentina's EEZ and monitor IUU fishing operations.

The South American country has two shipyards, Tandano and Río Santiago; however, unlike several of the other shipyards mentioned in this essay, their capabilities remain limited. The two recent domestic construction projects are two training boats for the Navy (Lancha de Instrucción de la Armada: LICA) and one small waterplane area twin hull (SWATH) for the Navy's oceanographic service. In April 2024, the Navy finally received the two LICA, *ARA Ciudad de Ensenada* and *ARA Ciudad de Berisso*, a project that took almost a decade to complete.²⁰ Tandano is tasked with repairing and upgrading *Santa Cruz*; however, the submarine has been housed in a hangar, severed in half, for nearly a decade, and the completion date for the repairs remains uncertain.

Buenos Aires appears to be keen on supporting the country's naval industry. In December 2021, the Ministry of Defense announced that Tandano will build a new polar vessel, which was followed by an announcement in March 2023, that both shipyards will build a new multipurpose vessel, modernize the Meko corvettes, and construct a floating dock. While ambitious, it is difficult to be optimistic since much smaller projects, namely the two LICAs, required around eight years to be constructed.²¹

Brazil has the most modern and capable fleet in the region. The Brazilian Navy (Marinha do Brasil: MB) boasts the region's only multipurpose carrier, the *NAM Atlantico* (A-140).²² The service also operates the most modern submarines.²³

Brazilian shipyards are capable of building surface and underwater platforms. Currently, the main two projects are the submarine project PROSUB, and the *Tamandaré* corvettes/frigates.²⁴ In addition, Brazilian shipyards are also building coastal patrol vessels and will construct a polar ship.²⁵

The submarine program deserves more analysis, as it is unique (so far) for the region. The first submarine, *Riachuelo*, was commissioned in September 2022, while *Humaita* (S-41) was commissioned in early 2024; the two final *Tonelero* (S-42), and *Angostura* (S-43) are in the final stages of testing and construction.²⁶ The Navy also plans to build a nuclear-powered submarine, to be named *Alvaro Alberto* (SN-10). The construction of the submarine fleet is a joint project with France's Naval Group shipyard. The fact that a South American shipyard can now manufacture submarines cannot be overestimated.²⁷

On 13 November 2024, a steel cutting ceremony took place for the future frigate Cunha Moreira (F202). A consortium Aguas Azuis, is tasked with building four Tamandare-class frigates. According to *EMGEPRON*, "it is the first that time three frigates will be built simultaneously in Brazilian territory."²⁸ The first frigate, Tamandare (F200), is undergoing final tests, while the second frigate, Jerônimo de Albuquerque (F201) is under construction and will be launched next August 2025.

Apart from the modernity of the vessels, the Brazilian Navy stands out because of its ambitious power projection objectives. Empirical data shows that other South American warships only leave the waters of the Western Hemisphere on very limited occasions: In 2016 Colombia sent the offshore patrol

19 ARA Bouchard (P-51), ARA Piedrabuena (P-52), ARA Almirante Storni (P-53), and ARA Contralmirante Cordero (P-54)

20 Navy, Argentina, "La Armada recibió dos nuevas lanchas"

21 Some media reports suggest the polar vessel project is stalled due to a lack of funds. See: Roldan, "El proyecto de diseño y construcción de un nuevo Buque Polar para la Armada Argentina"

22 Naval Technology, "NAM Atlantico Multi-Purpose Aircraft Carrier, Brazil"

23 The Tupi-class 209/1400 *Tupi* (S-30), *Tamoio* (S-31), and *Tapajo* (S-33) and the Tikuna-class 209/1400 *Tikuna* (S-34)

24 The keel of the first frigate was laid in March, 2023. Navy, Brazil, "Espinha dorsal da Fragata Classe "Tamandaré" é concluída"

25 Sánchez, "Brazil and Peru launch domestically built naval vessels"

26 Navy, Brazil, "Submarino 'Humaitá' realiza primeiro teste de propulsão no mar"

27 The only other country that has manufactured a submarine is, arguably, Cuba. The platform in question is the mysterious *Delfin* (Dolphin) mini-sub.

28 EMGEPRON, "Fragata "Cunha Moreira"

vessel *ARC 7 de Agosto* (PZE-47) to join the multinational task force EU NAVFOR Atalanta off the coast of Somalia to combat piracy.²⁹ Navies regularly send ships and/or personnel to the US-sponsored multinational exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), which is conducted around the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California, or to the US-sponsored exercises Subidex.³⁰ Chile also deploys ships to Eastern Island.³¹ Finally regional training vessels embark on intercontinental training voyages – for example Peru’s training ship *Unión* voyaged across the world, departing Callao in June 2023 and returning in April 2024.

The MB is an exemption to this rule since the service has a history of regularly deploying vessels to another continent, Africa. Brazil and the African continent have solid and historical relations, which includes defense relations, notably regarding Navies. Hence, Brazil regularly sends a vessel to Africa to participate in the US-sponsored exercise Obangame Express,³² and the Brazilian Navy organizes exercise Guinex with African navies.³³ The service also trains with the navies from India and South Africa via exercise IBSAMAR.³⁴ The MB aims to become a global navy by maintaining a trans-Atlantic presence to engage Brasilia’s African partners, and India. No other South American Navy has this level of power projection goals.

Chile's Navy (Armada de Chile) has a relatively strong fleet with four submarines, the two reasonably new Scorpene-class *O'Higgins* (SS-23) and *Carrera* (SS-22), and the older Thomson-class 209/1400L *Thomson* (SS-20) and *Simpson* (SS-21). The frigate fleet is a mix of ships, including the Adelaide-class frigates *Almirante Latorre* (FFG-14) and *Capitan Prat* (FFG-11), which Santiago purchased from Australia in 2020. Like other countries, the service operates a large fleet of coastal patrol vessels, that were domestically manufactured, which consist of OPV-80s patrol boats as well as Taitao-class and Protector-class platforms.

The service's main current project is to revamp its fleet of old transport vessels: the transport vessel *Aguiles* (AP-41) and Batral-class boats *Rancagua* (LST-92) and *Chacabuco* (LST-95), all built in the 1980s. The project is called *Escotillon IV* and the vessels will be built by the Chilean state-run shipyard ASMAR. In November 2024, ASMAR reported a 25% completion of the first transport vessel, and all four are expected to be ready by 2028.³⁵ The Navy also hopes to manufacture frigates to replace its current inventory.³⁶

Colombia (Armada de la Republica de Colombia: ARC) has a strong surface fleet, but relies on an old submarine fleet: 209/1200 submarines ARC *Pijao* (SO-28) and ARC *Tayrona* (SO-29) were built in the 1970s, while U-206 submarines ARC *Intrepido* (SC-23) and ARC *Indomable* (SC-24), were commissioned in 2015 but were constructed in the 1980s.

The core of the fleet consists of four Almirante Padilla-class frigates built in the 1980s.³⁷ In 2022, the Colombian government signed an agreement with the Dutch-based shipbuilder Damen to manufacture a fleet of frigates to replace the Almirante Padilla ships. As in other cases, this project involves a partnership between Damen and the local shipbuilding corporation COTECMAR. In October 2024, the two entities signed a contract for the construction of the first frigate.³⁸ The fleet also operates the Donghae-class corvette ARC *Nariño* (CM-55) and the Pohang-class corvette ARC *Tono* (CM-56),

29 Medina, “El buque colombiano que navegó 153 días por las costas de Somalia”

30 Navy, US, “RIMPAC 2022 Concludes”

31 Navy, Chile, “Buque de la Armada transportó toneladas de materiales a Isla de Pascua”

32 Sánchez, “Brazilian Navy participates in Exercise Obangame Express 2022”

33 Navy, Brazil, “Guinex-II”

34 Agencia Marinha de Noticias, “Marinha do Brasil, Índia e África do Sul iniciam Operação ‘IBSAMAR VIII’”

35 ASMAR, “Un 25% de avance presenta el primer buque de transporte multipropósito”

36 Yañez, “Chile y su ambicioso plan”

37 ARC Almirante Padilla (FM-51), ARC Caldas (FM-52), ARC Antioquia (FM-53), ARC Independiente (FM-54).

38 COTECMAR, “Cotecmar y Damen firman contrato”

two ships donated by South Korea in 2014 and 2020, respectively, which serve as a sort of stop-gap until the new frigates are built.

Second to Brazil, Colombia arguably has the most experienced shipbuilding industry as COTECMAR has built various platforms for the Colombian Navy, including Fassmer-80-class patrol boats and a fleet of logistical transport vessels (known locally as Buque de Apoyo Logístico y de Cabotaje: BAL-C). Even more, COTECMAR has the important distinction of having sold two ships to international clients, an achievement other South American shipyards have not reached yet. COTECMAR delivered the multipurpose transport vessel *Gracias a Dios* (FNH-1611) to the Honduran Navy in 2017³⁹ and a vessel of similar class, *Quetzal* (BL-1601), to the Guatemalan Navy in 2019.⁴⁰

Ecuador (Armada del Ecuador) has a small and aging fleet. Limited financial resources prohibit the acquisition of more modern units. The service operates submarines BAE *Shyri* (SS-101) and BAE *Huancavilca* (SS-102), manufactured in the 1970s, which received medium-life upgrades and maintenance at Chile's ASMAR facilities around a decade ago (2012-2014). The fleet's main warships are six Esmeralda-class corvettes built in the 1970s.

Currently, the Ecuadorian shipyard ASTINAVE is constructing the first-ever multipurpose combat vessel for the Navy. ASTINAVE has the skills to execute this project effectively and efficiently as the shipyard built two patrol vessels, *Isla San Cristobal* (LG-30) and *Isla Isabela* (LG-31), based on Damen's StanPatrol 5009 model, and has also developed the Orion command and control system, installed aboard Ecuadorian warships. Moreover, the shipyard plans to construct a new shipbuilding facility in Posorja, not far from Guayaquil, which will allow the service of the fleet and construction of "multipurpose vessels" with a length of "over 80 meters."⁴¹ The new facilities will help ASTINAVE build larger and more complex vessels in the future.

At the time of writing, however, Ecuador is facing major internal security challenges due to a wave of violence. The armed forces have been internally deployed, while Quito acquires tactical armored vehicles, helicopters and other platforms for ground and aerial operations. Hence, it is unlikely that the Navy will receive the necessary funds to either purchase or domestically manufacture, via ASTINAVE, vessels in the near future.

The **Peruvian Navy** (Marina de Guerra del Peru: MGP) operates a large but old fleet. Case in point, the MGP possesses six submarines, one of the largest submarine fleets in the region, but arguably the oldest, as all platforms were built in the 1970s. Currently, all submarines are receiving a service life extension by the Peruvian state-run shipyard SIMA. The two oldest submarines, 209/1100 BAP *Islay* (SS-35) and BAP *Arica* (SS-36), are scheduled to be decommissioned later this decade or by the 2030s. Similarly, the fleet has seven frigates, Carvajal/Lupo-class and Lupo-class, and six PR-72P-class corvettes built throughout the 1980s. In addition, the MGP has received two Pohang-class corvettes from South Korea, BAP *Ferre* (CM-27) and BAP *Guise* (CM-28), as a stop-gap until newer ships are commissioned.

Like other shipyards, the Peruvian state-run SIMA has become an expert in building patrol crafts, as it has manufactured a fleet of PGCP-50/Rio Pativilca-class and Río Cañete-Class patrol vessels that are actively patrolling Peruvian waters. In addition, the shipyard has also built the Makassar-class landing platform dock BAP *Pisco* (AMP-156) and is constructing a second vessel, the future BAP *Paita* (AMP-157). Once the second is completed, the service will have a substantial fleet of transport vessels – in addition to the *Patiño*/Amsterdam-class vessel BAP *Tacna* (ARL-158), acquired from the Netherlands in 2014 – for defense or HA/DR operations.

39 COTECMAR, "Colombia entrega a Honduras buque elaborado por Cotecmar"

40 COTECMAR, "Buque Logístico y de Ayuda Humanitaria BL-1601 Quetzal construido por COTECMAR." In October 2024, Colombia and Guatemala announced a contract for the sale of eight riverine combat boats for the Guatemalan armed forces, to be constructed by COTECMAR. Foreign Affairs Ministry, Colombia, "Colombia y Guatemala fortalecen su cooperación en materia de seguridad y defensa naval"

41 El Universo, "Se inicia la construcción de complejo Geomarítimo de Posorja"

Help is in the horizon for Peru's heavier warships and even submarines. In April 2024, Lima signed an agreement with South Korea's Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) to construct [four surface vessels](#): one frigate or multirole ship, one oceanic patrol vessel, and two logistic support platforms. The platforms, to be locally manufactured by the state-run shipyard SIMA with HHI assistance, are expected to be operational by 2029. Moreover, during the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Lima in mid-November 2024, the Peruvian government and HHI signed an additional memorandum of understanding for the joint construction of [submarines](#). The Peruvian Navy could be the regions' second service to operate homemade subs, assuming the project moves forward and SIMA receives the proper (financial) support.

The **Uruguayan Navy (Armada Nacional del Uruguay)** operates the oldest fleet in South America, with only one ship capable of carrying a helicopter, the Lüneburg-class transport vessel *General Artigas* (ROU04). The service is decommissioning its oldest vessels.⁴²

Given very limited financial resources, donations and second-hand vessels are the primary options to keep the fleet operational. As previously mentioned, the Washington donated three Protector-class vessels to the Armada, Seoul donated a Chamsuri-class patrol vessel, and a German organization has donated search-and-rescue boats. The service's most recent acquisition was the scientific vessel *Oyarvide* (ROU 22) a second-hand vessel purchased from a US company. The service had operated without a scientific vessel since 2015, so a replacement was needed.⁴³

The navy has been trying to acquire at least two offshore patrol vessels for around a decade. In June 2023, the Navy announced the selection of Spanish shipyard Cardama for two OPVs, expected to be delivered throughout 2025.⁴⁴ Uruguay had general elections in October-November 2024, with Yamandú Orsi emerging as the winner and next president of the country. The Navy's procurement projects, namely the OPVs, will depend on the Orsi administration's defense strategy.

Venezuela has experienced over a decade of sanctions against the *Nicolás* Maduro regime and a crippled economy. Moreover, historically, Caracas has focused on acquiring equipment for the Army and Air Force, without many new assets, or budget, for the Navy (Armada Bolivariana: AB). These two factors are not helpful to maintaining a strong fleet.

The service's two submarines, the 209/1300 *Sabalo* (S-31) and *Caribe* (S-32), are probably not operational. The backbone of the fleet consists of four Italian Mariscal Sucre-class frigates: *Mariscal Sucre* (F-21), *Almirante Biron* (F-22), *General Urdaneta* (F-23), and *General Soublotte* (F-24). Due to the Maduro regime's lack of transparency, it is unclear what armament they carry or their operational status, though it is probably not ideal. In early January 2023, the Venezuela shipyard DIANCA released photos of *Almirante Bríón*, stating that the ship is undergoing maintenance and cleaning of the hull in a dry dock.⁴⁵ The service has not obtained new warships in over a decade.

President Maduro and the Venezuelan military leadership regularly issue statements about the Venezuelan military's strength; however, the fleet's status shows that the Navy is no Kraken of the Caribbean.⁴⁶ As the author of this essay has argued in other publications, the Navy has "minimal capabilities regarding power projection, as exemplified by its non-existent submarine fleet, the loss of [ANBV *Naiguatá* (GC-23)] and voyages by US warships through waters claimed by Venezuela. Rather, the Navy's main tasks are to conduct internal security operations in Venezuela's exclusive economic zone and harass the militarily weak Guyana."⁴⁷

42 Navy, Uruguay "Arriado de Pabellón" Also see: Navy, Uruguay, "Arribo ROU 26 'Vanguardia'"

43 Navy, Uruguay, "El buque científico "ROU 22 Oyarvide""

44 Sánchez, "Uruguay looks to Spain for new OPVs"

45 Tweet, DIANCA, 11 January, 2023

46 Sánchez, "The Venezuelan Navy"

47 Sánchez, "The Venezuelan Navy." Caracas and Georgetown have a historical territorial dispute.

Analysis and Conclusions

This section will begin with an arguably bold prediction: inter-state warfare in South America in the foreseeable future is unlikely. As previously mentioned, the last inter-state war in the region occurred over a quarter of a century ago, and the last war with a maritime theater of operation took place over four decades ago. In other words, generations of sailors across South American navies have spent their careers without having to fire a missile or torpedo at a target (except during live exercises) or being shot at by a warship of another state (incidents with smugglers and fishing vessels at high-sea notwithstanding). While there are border disputes in the region, an unpredictable Venezuela, and regular statements from Buenos Aires that the Malvinas/Falklands Islands will one day return to Argentine control, the likelihood of inter-state conflict remains minimal.

The one potential dark cloud on the horizon is Venezuela, which has a long-standing territorial dispute with Guyana over the Essequibo region, which Georgetown controls. Oil deposits in the area have made the Essequibo even more important for Guyana's economic and developmental future. In early December 2023, the Maduro regime organized a referendum over the Essequibo, stating that "voters approved rejecting 'by all means' the 1899 boundary, turning Essequibo into a state, giving area residents Venezuelan citizenship and rejecting the U.N. court's jurisdiction over the dispute."⁴⁸ The author of this essay does not believe the Maduro regime will attack the militarily weak Guyana to gain (or regain) control of the Essequibo. However, this border dispute, and the Maduro regime's attitude, is the closest to a plausible inter-state conflict in South America nowadays.

For most countries, maintaining a minimal deterrent force is necessary; hence submarine fleets will continue to exist, though buying or manufacturing them will be a controversial topic, given that submarines are not multipurpose assets, as compared to an OPV, a transport vessel or landing platform dock. With that said, Brazil's PROSUB program and Peru's MOU with South Korea's HHI suggest that interest in subs remain a priority for regional navies, for power projection and to maintain deterrence capabilities.

This essay has discussed the status of the fleets and shipbuilding projects, but, due to space considerations, not ship maintenance and upgrades. A ship can be very old, say built in the 1970s, but if it receives regular maintenance and modern command and control systems, weapons systems, radars, and other technology are installed aboard, the asset can still be regarded as useful even if the ship/hull is old. Obviously, installing new systems is a technique widely utilized by South American and global navies to keep older hulls operational – case in point, Argentina is turning to its shipyards Tandano and Río Santiago to modernize its six MEKO-140 corvettes, which were launched in the early 1980s. With that said, even a legacy ship with modern equipment will have to be decommissioned eventually, and this is what we are seeing in the region nowadays.

As this essay has explained, South American navies are strongly interested in domestically manufacturing vessels. Landing-platform docks, transport vessels, offshore patrol vessels, coastal patrol vessels, as well as non-military platforms like training tall ships, polar vessels, oceanographic ships, and auxiliary vessels, have all been built by shipyards like Chile's ASMAR, Colombia's COTECMAR, Ecuador's ASTINAVE, Peru's SIMA, and Brazilian shipyards. Expanding infrastructure, like Brazil's PROSUB program or plans for a new dock in Posorja for Ecuador, will significantly assist future construction projects. If the contract with HHI for subs also moves forward, Peru's SIMA may need to expand its infrastructure as well.

Shipbuilding across South America will depend on governmental support. Argentina is an example of this problematic situation. The construction of two LICA training boats and repairs of the *Santa Cruz* have taken several years due to limited funding and a lack of government assistance. Venezuela is in a

48 Associated Press, "Guyana and Venezuela's Territorial Dispute: What to Know" Also see: Berg & Hernandez-Roy, "The Entirely Manufactured and Dangerous Crisis over the Essequibo"

similar situation, as the country has two shipyards, DIANCA and UCOCAR, which can barely maintain the Navy's ancient fleet. The international sanctions on the Maduro regime and the country's economic crises means limited assistance can be given to the two shipyards. On a more optimistic note, several shipyards are engaged in ambitious projects, taking technical knowledge and capabilities to new limits: Brazil is building submarines and the Tamandaré frigates. At the same time, Colombia's COTECMAR will team up with DAMEN to build frigates. Peru now prepares to build frigates, its first OPV, and maybe even submarines, while Chilean Navy has also expressed its goal of building frigates in the future.

Will future South American fleets be exclusively composed of domestically-manufactured vessels and submarines? Of course not. There will always be a need for acquiring more advanced vessels than the platforms local shipyards can produce. Donations from partner nations will occur, while sales (particularly, if they include attractive offset packages) will make procuring ships or submarines very appealing. Moreover, even if a South American shipyard builds a vessel, international suppliers will be needed for modern equipment including weapons, communications, command and control, engines, and sonars & radars.

Over four decades have passed since the last inter-state conflict in South American waters with a maritime theater of operations. While border disputes, tensions, and "bad blood" exist in the region, the likelihood of another inter-state conflict nowadays is minimal. A need for minimal deterrence capabilities means that several South American navies will continue to regard submarines, frigates, and (in the case of Brazil) a carrier as vital assets. However, the variety of maritime crimes (e.g., drug trafficking or IUU fishing) that occur in the South Atlantic, Eastern Pacific and Caribbean means that services are also focused on smaller, fleet-in-one assets, namely offshore patrol vessels. The importance of transport vessels and landing platforms docks is also growing, as they can be utilized for HA/DR missions, not solely for military operations. In this evolving reality, the role of regional shipyards cannot be ignored. South American Navies not only desire, and require, new vessels but also want future surface and underwater platforms to be manufactured domestically. In the 21st century, the future of South American fleets truly begins at home.

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International Ambitions: Brazilian Naval Strategy in the 21st Century

Andrea Resende

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, the main focus of Brazil's foreign policy has been the regional integration and cooperation in the American continent and in the South Atlantic. Although Brazil suffered many political and economic crises across the decades, it has been able to maintain its presence in regional initiatives such as the Mercosur, the Union of South American Nations, the Organization of the American States, and the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic. This, in addition to a stable economy and domestic politics, helped to place Brazil as an emerging power together with Russia, India, and China¹. In this sense, the Brazilian Navy (BN) reflects Brazil as a country: a regional leader with international ambitions.

Despite being one of the oldest and most powerful navies in the region, the Brazilian Navy still struggles to maintain security and peace in its maritime domain. The cause of this struggle may reside in the gigantic size of its Exclusive Economic Zone, difficulties of maintaining and improving its force structure and capabilities, a short and complex budget, and an economic and political crisis that delays investments and programs for replacing vessels. Yet, the Brazilian Navy maintains a high level of regional and international cooperation, functioning as an extension of Brazil's foreign policy.

In this consideration, this chapter is dedicated to take a closer look at the Brazilian Navy and invite the reader to understand the complex dynamic of the South Atlantic region. The first topic will describe the main characteristics and geopolitical concepts of Brazil's maritime domain, since they are important to understand the main objectives of the Brazilian Navy's Strategy. The second topic will explore the Maritime Strategy of the Brazilian Navy, as well as its objectives, threats and challenges. The last topic examines contemporary challenges for the Brazilian Navy, such as the difficulties in maintaining its force structure and budgetary restrictions.

Brazil's Maritime Space

To comprehend the current Naval Strategy of Brazil, it is fundamental to address the countries geopolitics. Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world with a territory of more than 8.500 million km². Its international borders with a length of approximately 15.735km meet ten countries in South America, including France through French Guiana. In its large extension, Brazil sums 60.000 km² of internal waterways and has a coastline of 7.367 km² facing the South Atlantic Ocean. Considering Brazil's maritime dimensions (riverine and naval) two geopolitical concepts arise: the Brazilian *Strategical Surroundings*² and the *Blue Amazon*.

The Brazilian *Strategical Surroundings* are an area "composed by South America, the Atlantic Ocean, the western coast of Africa, and Antarctica³." The concept is present in all major documents of the Ministry of Defense: The National Defense Policy (PND), the National Defense Strategy (SND) and the White Book of Defense (LBDN). The *Strategical Surroundings* are a relatively new concept, first addressed in the National Defense Policy of 2005. Yet, the basis for this concept was laid by Brazilian geographers in the 1950s/1960s, especially through the works of Therezinha de Castro and General

¹ Schenoni, Luis L.; Ribeiro, Pedro Feliú; Lopes, Dawisson Belém; Casarões, Guilherme. Myths of Multipolarity: the sources of Brazil's Foreign Policy Overstretch. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, v. 18, n. 1, Jan. 2022. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/fpa/article/18/1/orab037/6502551>.

² Also sometimes referred to as "Brazilian Strategical Environments".

³ Brasil. Livro Branco de Defesa Nacional. 2020a, p. 27.
"[...] constituído pela América do Sul, Atlântico Sul, costa ocidental da África e Antártica"

Carlos de Meira Mattos, who emphasized the importance of the South Atlantic for Brazilian geopolitics and suggested to consider the Antarctic⁴ as part of the South Atlantic.⁵

The *Blue Amazon* is a concept created in 2004 by the Brazilian Navy as a “political-strategic concept⁶” to create awareness of a maritime area as rich as the Amazon rainforest. The *Blue Amazon* consists of the area of Brazil’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about 3,5 million km², which has plenty of natural resources such as fishing, natural gas, and oil (including the pre-salt reserves). The area also has a scientific relevance, since its biodiversity has only been poorly explored to date⁷. Since 2004, Brazil is trying to expand its EEZ by claiming its prolonged continental shelf and the Rio Grande Rise (about 1100 km/680 miles from the coast). The project of the expansion was submitted to the United Nations as a result of the Brazilian Continental Shelf Survey (LEPLAC), which was conducted from 1986 to 2004. While the majority of the arguments and technical aspects of the project gained approval, approximately 19% faced rejection by the UN. This led to multiple redesigns of the project, which are still pending final approval. Once implemented, the *Blue Amazon* would increase to 5,7 million km², an area bigger than all European Union countries combined⁸.

Several other concepts and terminologies are part of the Brazilian Naval Strategy, such as sea power, sea control/denial, communication lines and naval diplomacy. However, both, the *Strategical Surroundings* and *Blue Amazon* derive from Brazil’s particular geopolitical position in the South Atlantic. In this sense, concepts that prioritize the South Atlantic are interesting to observe, since they are shaping the policies and strategies of the Brazilian Navy in the 21st century, especially in a deepening cooperation with other South American and African states to secure peace in the South Atlantic and limiting external influences.

The Brazilian Naval Strategy

Having the South Atlantic as its main area of operations, the strategy of the Brazilian Navy follows five objectives: to defend the homeland; to maintain security and order in its jurisdictional waters; to support and cooperate with the constitutional powers; to cooperate with national development; and to act as an instrument of foreign policy. Those objectives result from a complementary law that ensures the norms for the organization, readiness and employment of Brazilian Armed Forces^{9,10}.

The BN coordinates efforts with several institutions and other branches of the Armed Forces as well as with regional allies, such as Argentina, South Africa, Uruguay, Mexico, the United States, etc. following its *Strategic Surroundings* concept.

Apart from the operations in the EEZ, the document also emphasizes the importance of the riverine dimension, which forces the Brazilian Navy to act as both a brown and a blue water navy. Although the blue water character is stronger, the force structure of the Brazilian Navy also includes vessels for riverine operations. For example, the Navy operates five hospital ships for river operations that provide health care to the indigenous and the “*ribeirinhos*” population that lives at the margin of the Amazon

⁴ According to Mattos (2014), the Antarctic continent was only added in the concept in the National Defense Policy of 2012.

⁵ Figueiredo, Moreno de Queiroz; Silva, Marcos Valle Machado da. Obangame Express – Uma ponte estratégica para o Golfo da Guiné. *Revista da Escola de Guerra Naval*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 28, n. 2, p. 405-435, maio/agosto 2022. Available at: <https://www.revistadaegn.com.br/index.php/revistadaegn/article/view/1060>.

⁶ Marinha do Brasil. Plano Estratégico da Marinha (PEM 2040). *Marinha do Brasil*. Estado-Maior da Armada, Brasília-DF: 2020, p.19.

⁷ Wiesebron, Marianne L. Blue Amazon: Thinking the Defense of Brazilian maritime territory. *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, v.2, n.3, Jan/Jun 2013. Available at: <https://www.seer.ufrgs.br/austral/article/download/35039/23931%26lang%3Den/0>

⁸ Silva, Alexandre Pereira da. Brazil advances over the Area: The inclusion of the Rio Grande Rise within the Brazilian outer continental shelf and its consequences for other states and for the common heritage of mankind. *Marine Policy*,

Volume 125, March 2021. Available at:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X21000099?casa_token=6r58SRGI_tgAAAAA:G6y_nnwM2wxgXvJlipuT34XQ6my9S6fqO_NX_GkqNkPWSQVtUDUw0TgaltnCHXwV-C4cPVsYCmo#sec0010

⁹ Brasil. *Lei Complementar nº 97, de 9 de junho de 1999*. Diário Oficial da União, Seção 1, Edição Extra, 10 Jun. 1999, p. 1. Available at: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/leicom/1999/leicomplementar-97-9-junho-1999-377583-publicacaooriginal-1-pl.html>. Accessed in: Sep. 2023.

¹⁰ Marinha do Brasil, 2020.

River and its tributaries. Both populations usually live far from cities and from medical care infrastructure, and due to the density of the Amazon rainforest, it is only possible to reach the communities by ship or helicopter.

In sum, Brazil operates 103 vessels, divided into three “naval means” (naval forces): the fleet means with 21 vessels, including four conventional submarines; the research means with 10 surface vessels; and the district means, with 72 vessels. Besides its vessels, the navy operates 18 helicopters for Anti-Submarine Warfare, three helicopters for Combat Search and Rescue, 55 transport helicopters, three attack aircrafts and the Scan Eagle as main Unmanned Aerial Vehicle. The “jewel” of the BN’s force structure is the Nuclear Submarine program under development.

The program for the development of Brazil’s first submarine with nuclear propulsion was initiated in 1979 as the Submarine Program (PROSUB). However, it was only in 2008 that it gained a new push. While Brazil had already developed the nuclear fuel cycle, the program did not manage to develop a nuclear reactor. In 2008, Brazil and France signed an agreement for the transfer of technology. Since then, the partnership is responsible for the development of submarines with nuclear and conventional propulsion (Scorpène Class). The nuclear submarine “Álvaro Alberto” is expected to be delivered to the Navy in 2029. The first conventional submarine of the “Scorpène Class” was already commissioned in 2022, while the next four will be ready in the next subsequent years.^{11,12} It is important to highlight that Brazil, even obtaining fuel cycle technology, has remained a non-nuclear state, being part of several treaties for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

According to the Naval Strategic Plan (PEM) 2020, it is vital for the Brazilian Navy to be able to concentrate naval power in both dimensions (naval and riverine), safeguarding the activities¹³ and the environment against threats. The document lists that the main threats to Brazil’s security are piracy; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing); biopiracy and illegal access to knowledge; organized crime and urban conflicts; terrorism; cyber threats; disasters and pandemics; and the dispute for natural resources¹⁴. It is possible that some may find it odd to see “terrorism” as one of the threats, since Brazil is known as a mostly peaceful country with no external threats. However, the Navy observes that acts of terrorism have grown worldwide since 2001 and recognizes the possibility that terrorist groups may conduct a variety of attacks to critical infrastructures, such as oil and gas offshore installations. Therefore, the Navy prepares to deter such a threat and be ready to act in a worst-case scenario¹⁵.

Additionally, the Brazilian Navy has invested its cyber defense capabilities to protect itself and critical infrastructure against cyberattacks. It has been establishing its cyber defense capabilities under the Special Operations Naval Command, involving the Navy’s Intelligence Command and the Directory for Communication and Information Technology. The main asset for cyber defense is the “Dreadnought System”, released in 2017, which has the objective to protect the cybernetic space of the Brazilian Navy and Marines. The Dreadnought identifies, blocks and reports cyber threats. It also monitors, analyzes and reports the traffic network in real time. Since the release of the Dreadnought system, it has been updated and applied in exercises, used for training and tested in fleet operations, such as the OCTOPUS and ALLIGATOR.¹⁶

Recently, Brazil has been a target for IUU fishing from vessels from China, Spain, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea¹⁷. The BN has three different systems to monitor the activities in its EEZ: the Monitoring System for the Support of Oil Exploration Activities¹⁸; the Maritime Traffic Information

¹¹ Costa, Eugênio Pacelli Diniz. Brazil’s nuclear submarine: A broader approach to the safeguards issue. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, v. 60, n. 2, 2017. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbpi/a/rLVkKjYYn3KgBnwb5kcxZbz/?lang=en>. Aug: 2023.

¹² Marinha do Brasil, 2020.

¹³ The Brazilian Navy understands as maritime activities as fishing, maritime sports and leisure, trade, scientific research, among others.

¹⁴ Brasil 2020a, p.23-31.

¹⁵ Brasil 2020a, p. 27.

¹⁶ Mota Júnior, Salvador; Martins Norival Lourenço. Sistema Dreadnought na vanguarda da proteção cibernética operativa. *Revista Passadiço*, v. 34, n.42, p. 50 – 54, 2022. Available at: <https://www.portaldeperiodicos.marinha.mil.br/index.php/passadico/article/view/3731>.

¹⁷ Brasil. *Portal da Transparência*. 2023b. Available at: <https://portaldatransparencia.gov.br/orcamento?ano=2022>.

¹⁸ Brasil. Salvamar Brasil: SIMMAP: Sistema de Monitoramento Marítimo de Apoio às Atividades de Petróleo. 2024a. Available at: <https://www.marinha.mil.br/salvamarbrasil/Sistema/simmap-sistema-de-monitoramento-mar%C3%ADtimo-de-apoio-%C3%A0s-atividades-de-petr%C3%B3leo>.

System¹⁹; and the Program for Tracking Fishing Vessels²⁰. However, predatory fishing usually occurs at the borders of the Brazilian EEZ, making it difficult for Brazil to deter. In addition, some vessels may turn off their Automatic Identification System to not alarm the authorities.

Therefore, in the BN's perspective, the region of the Continental Shelf needs protection against IUU fishing, even though approval of the expansion project is still pending. In this context, the understanding of the BN is that naval force may be applied against any threat to the area, such as dumping of toxic waste and IUU fishing, which may damage the maritime environment and hinder other maritime activities, such as fishing.

In addition, there is another dimension to IUU fishing in Brazilian waters: only a few of the nation's fishing vessels are able to navigate further away from the coast: 20% of the fishing vessels can navigate beyond 50 miles of the shore.²¹ The remaining 80% are comprised of small vessels that "[...] organize themselves around a 50 nautical miles limit for trawling, avoiding going beyond this limit due to a lack of capabilities for dealing with the weather of industrial oceanic fishing"²². Therefore, IUU fishing may not be resolved by only improving deterrence, but also by reinforcing the fishing fleet structure to explore the resources available. Thus, Brazil needs to invest in the development and modernization of its shipbuilding industry, making it affordable for fishermen to obtain new vessels.

Another concern of the Brazilian Navy is the increasing incidents involving piracy, hijacking, kidnapping and robbery of vessels in the South Atlantic, most notably in the Gulf of Guinea. According to a report from Stable Seas (2020):

From January through December 2019, 98 incidents of piracy and robbery of vessels were recorded in the Gulf of Guinea in the Stable Seas dataset. In the corresponding time in 2018, 112 incidents were recorded. However, the biggest change was in failed attacks, with 24 fewer failed attacks recorded in 2019 than in 2018. This means that overall, pirates became more effective in 2019. Four more hijacking/kidnapping incidents (32 total) were reported in 2019 compared to 2018, resulting in 102 crew kidnapped in 2018 and 164 in 2019. In December 2019 alone, 53 crewmembers were kidnapped in the Gulf of Guinea. Three crewmembers were kidnapped in January 2020 (Stable Seas, 2020, p. 39).

Piracy and the attacks on vessels and even on critical infrastructures perpetuated by criminal organizations may reach other parts of the South Atlantic, causing disruption on maritime trade and economic insecurity. In line with the strategic concepts of the Brazilian Navy, the Gulf of Guinea is therefore also identified as a strategic surrounding. Dangers in the region are to be countered in intensive cooperation with the countries of the Gulf. The cooperation is fostered by exercises, joint operations, or via regional institutions.

As it was explained earlier, the Brazilian jurisdictional waters and its *Strategic Surroundings* are massive areas for which the Navy does not yet have sufficient means to secure altogether. To ensure an effective protection of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), the Navy needs its regional partners, which illustrates the Navy's role as a foreign policy instrument. As the PEM 2040 determines, the Navy will act as diplomatic mechanism to promote cooperation with other powers in order to achieve national interests:

On the other hand, it is true that the maritime environment does not reveal only threats, but also opportunities such as the exercise of diplomacy and the possibility of creating strategic alliances. [...] This type of naval diplomacy converges with the interests of Brazil and must be adopted as an opportunity of international projection through the naval projection, yet under the

¹⁹ Brasil. Salvamar Brasil: SISTRAM (Sistema de Informações sobre Tráfego Marítimo). 2024b. Available at: <https://www.marinha.mil.br/salvamarbrasil/Sistema/sistram>.

²⁰ Brasil. Ministério da Agricultura e Pecuária. Rastramento por Satélite das Embarcações de Pesca Brasileiras. 21 Ago. 2023. Brasília: Ministério da Agricultura e Pecuária, 2023c. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/agricultura/pt-br/assuntos/mpa/cadastro-registro-e-monitoramento/rastramento-por-satelite-das-embarcacao-de-pesca-brasileiras>.

²¹ Lima, José. Construção naval e o avanço sobre a pesca global: lições da China para o caso brasileiro. *Grupo Economia do Mar Policy Brief*, v. 3, n. 2, p. 17-28, 2023.

²² [...] essas pequenas embarcações organizam-se em torno das 50 milhas náuticas para a prática da pesca de arrasto, evitando pescar além desse delimitador por não possuírem capacidade instalada e estrutural para lidar com as intempéries climáticas vigentes na pesca industrial oceânica.

principle of the law regarding the freedom of navigation and with the support of international institutions (Marinha do Brasil, 2020, p. 37 -38)²³

Besides strengthening international cooperation through naval diplomacy, the Navy increases its power projection and deterrence against threats in the area. For example, the United International Anti-Submarine Warfare exercise (UNITAS) takes place annually in the South Atlantic since 1959. The exercise was created by the South Atlantic Maritime Coordination (CAMAS) to promote cooperation and collaboration between the members of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, which includes the United States and the states of Central and South America²⁴. In recent years, external powers, such as France, South Korea, Belize, Namibia and Spain, have also joined the exercise^{25,26}.

Other joint exercises that occur in the region are, among others, PANAMAX (enhancing security in the Panama Canal), OBANGAME EXPRESS (battling piracy off the African continent) and IBSAMAR, with South Africa and India. Brazil also conducts regular bilateral exercises with other countries such as São Tomé and Príncipe, Namibia, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay^{27,28}.

However, even with joint exercises that enhance security in the South Atlantic, the Brazilian Navy needs a force structure adequate to meet its ends and to confront contemporary threats in its jurisdictional waters. On its mission to create such a force structure, the Brazilian Navy is facing challenges that reach beyond political, economic or military means. Those challenges relate to the cycles of economic and political instability in Brazil and the lack of interest of political institutions in maritime security.

New century, new challenges

Besides the perceived threats to national security, it is possible to observe distinct challenges that the Brazilian Navy is facing in the 21st century: regaining the trust of the civil society; confronting sea-blindness in the political institutions and public opinion; improving its force structure; and improving cooperation in the South Atlantic.

The first challenge roots in times of Brazil's Military Dictatorship (1964 – 1985). After the dictatorship, there were two main problems with the structure of the Brazilian Armed Forces. First, each of the three branches had its own Ministry and, though it provided a high level of autonomy, there was a lack of coordination regarding the interests and objectives of the national defense and security policies. Second, the trust between the Brazilian society and the Armed Forces was extremely fragile after decades of a military dictatorship that imposed censorship and persecuted thousands of Brazilians.

To solve those problems, the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003) created the Ministry of Defense in 1999. This change was significant since the Ministry of the Army and the Ministry of the Navy existed since 1822 and were the first institutions created when Brazil gained its independence from Portugal. Yet, the creation of a civilian organization to which all branches would be subordinated was an important step for leaving behind the structures that permeated the Armed Forces during the military dictatorship and towards bringing the civil society closer to the Brazilian Armed Forces.²⁹ This approximation was only possible with civilians joining military educational institutions in Brazil, such as the Army's Meira Mattos Institute, the Naval War School, and the Air Force's Aeronautics Institute of Technology. Since this change in the Armed Forces structure, the

²³ Por outro lado, é fato que o ambiente marítimo não revela somente ameaças, mas também oportunidades, como o exercício da diplomacia e a possibilidade do estabelecimento de alianças estratégicas. [...]Tal forma de diplomacia naval converge com os interesses do Brasil, devendo ser adotada como uma oportunidade de projeção internacional pela presença naval, à luz do princípio jurídico da liberdade de navegação ou sob o amparo de organismos internacionais.

²⁴ Bolívia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Nicaragua left the Treaty.

²⁵ Penha, Eli Alves. *Relações Brasil-África e a geopolítica do Atlântico Sul*. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2011.

²⁶ Souza, Andrea Luiza Fontes Resende de. 2017. *As Forças Navais dos Estados Unidos no Atlântico Sul: Um estudo de caso sobre a Quarta Esquadra*. 195 f. Masters Thesis – Programa de Pós Graduação em Relações Internacionais, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte. Available at: http://www.biblioteca.pucminas.br/teses/RelInternac_SouzaAL_1.pdf.

²⁷ Souza 2017.

²⁸ Brasil 2020a; 2020b.

²⁹ Vasconcellos, Antônio Raposo. *A sociedade brasileira e a Defesa Nacional: uma aproximação após a criação do Ministério da Defesa*. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2011.

strategy of the Brazilian Navy has followed the guidelines provided by the Department of Defense through the National Defense Policy and Strategy, plus the White Book of Defense. In this context, it must be clear that every national defense policy/strategy is only published and released to the public after being approved by the National Congress, as to assure participation of the Brazilian society through its political institutions. Even though this may look like an “ordinary feature” for any democratic state, for the Brazilian civil society it is a major step towards the consolidation of its New Republic after 1985.

Yet, the perception of trust is still low: a study conducted in 2022 shows that only 30% of the population trust Brazil’s Armed Forces and 34% considers it untrustworthy.^{30,31} Another study shows that the percentage of the population that had a high level of trust in the Armed Forces dropped from 31% in 2018 to 25% in 2022.^{32,33} It is assumed that the level of trust in the Armed Forces and, subsequently, the Navy, may increase the lack of support in initiatives and actions, the perception of uselessness of the service towards the nation, and even the decline in enrollment. To counter this development, the Brazilian Navy has been adamant in improving the society’s trust in the institution. In 2018, the BN released the “Integrity’s Plan” with the objective to act as:

[...] a governance’s tool capable to promote measures and institutional actions for the prevention, detection, and prosecution of fraud, corruption, irregularities and misconduct, which can compromise the image and credibility of the Force and negatively affect its activities. (Marinha do Brasil, 2023)³⁴.

The concept was developed under the Ministry of Defense’s own Plan of Integrity for promoting transparency and fighting corruption. The “Integrity’s Management Unit” was founded in 2021 under the subordination of the BN, to apply, support, and expand the Integrity Plan.³⁵

The second and third challenge, sea-blindness and the Navy’s force structure are deeply connected. The sea-blindness of political institutions is particularly evident in the lack of discussion about the budgeting of the Armed Forces, and therefore the Navy. The Brazilian Navy has a historical difficulty maintaining its force structure due to budgets constraints. In the next few years, the BN will decommission 40% of its current fleet, due to the lack of budget for maintenance and acquisition. This is a disturbing scenario considering the dimension of Brazil’s area of operations in the South Atlantic.

To counter this scenario, Brasília should invest in the nation’s shipbuilding capacity, rather than acquiring used vessels, as it has done in the past. In this context, even though Brazil has been investing in the construction of new vessels in the past decade, the investment is not enough^{36, 37}

According to Admiral Olsen³⁸, commander of the BN, one of the restrictions for maintaining and expanding the naval force (and sustaining the current programs) is the small amount of budget destined for the Navy. Only 1% of the 2022 budget was destined for the Armed Forces (R\$ 71 billion³⁹), of which

³⁰ Carta Capital. Brasileiros confiam mais em professores do que em militares, diz pesquisa. *Carta Capital*, 09 Aug. 2022. Available at: <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/brasileiros-confiam-mais-em-professores-do-que-em-militares-diz-pesquisa/>.

³¹ Poder 360. *Só 30% dos Brasileiros confiam nas Forças Armadas*, 9. Ago. 2022. Available at:

<https://www.poder360.com.br/brasil/so-30-dos-brasileiros-confiam-nas-forcas-armadas-diz-pesquisa/>

³² Couto, Marlen. Desconfiança nas Forças Armadas sobe oito pontos em quatro anos, e partidos diminuem rejeição. *O Globo*, 04 Jul. 2022. Available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/blogs/pulso/post/2022/07/desconfianca-nas-forcas-armadas-sobe-oito-pontos-em-quatro-anos-e-partidos-diminuem-rejeicao.ghml>.

³³ Brasil, 2023a.

³⁴ [...] ferramenta de governança capaz de promover a adoção e a manutenção de medidas e ações institucionais destinadas à prevenção, à detecção e à punição de fraudes, atos de corrupção, irregularidades e desvios de conduta, os quais podem comprometer a imagem e a credibilidade da Força e afetar negativamente suas atividades.

³⁵ Brasil. Portaria MD/MB nº 28, de 8 de Setembro de 2021. Institui a Unidade de Gestão de Integridade responsável pela coordenação da estruturação, execução e monitoramento do Programa de Integridade no âmbito da Marinha do Brasil. *Ministério da Defesa, Marinha do Brasil*. Available at: https://www.marinha.mil.br/sites/default/files/integridade_naval_-_arquivo_1.pdf.

³⁶ Brasil, 2023a;

³⁷ Flôr, Claudio Rogério Andrade. *Defesa, Orçamento e Tecnologia: Um estudo de caso da Marinha do Brasil (1990 – 2005)*. Rio de Janeiro: Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2008. Available at: <https://app.uff.br/riuff/bitstream/handle/1/8229/Disserta%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20de%202008%20Cl%C3%A1udio%20Rog%C3%A9rio%20de%20Andrade%20Flôr%201.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

³⁸ Brasil, 2023a

³⁹ About US\$14 billion.

26,7% was destined for the Navy (R\$19 billion⁴⁰).⁴¹ Yet, another problem concerning the BN's budget is its distribution: in the 2022 budget, 88% was destined for personnel and other obligatory payments, leaving just 12% to invest and maintain the force structure.⁴² This trend has compromised the BN's investment for more than two decades. As of now, there are no discussions by the Brazilian Congress to solve these budgetary problems of the Navy. According to the BN, there are two ways to solve this problem in the short term: the approval of a fixed budget for the Armed Forces by the Congress, increasing the BN's resources; and to allocate a small part of the profits from the pre-salt oil's reserves to the BN.⁴³

In addition, to compensate the rate of decommission, the Brazilian Navy has three different programs: the Submarine Program (PROSUB), the Program for Obtaining the Tamandaré Class Frigates (PCT), and the Program for Obtaining Hydro-Oceanographics Resources (PROHIDRO). The goal of the PCT is to commission four new multipurpose frigates between 2025 and 2029. The PROSUB has already led to the commissioning of one new conventional submarine, the *S Humaitá*, and it is expected that three more submarines will follow until 2029. The PROHIDRO is responsible for acquiring a new research vessel. Additionally, the MANSUP program is developing new anti-surface missiles.^{44,45}

In 2018, to cope with contemporary threats and the lack of naval capabilities, the Brazilian Navy transformed the former amphibious helicopter carrier *Atlântico*, into a Multipurpose Aircraft Carrier (NAM) for unmanned aerial vehicles. The change in the ship's purpose is small yet relevant, since it shows the relevance of unmanned vehicles in naval activities and operations. Unmanned vehicles are cheaper than buying or building new vessels and can improve the surveillance of areas, such as the Rio Grande Rise, which is an area of great economic interest due to its richness in resources^{46,47}. To enhance the monitoring and surveillance capabilities, the Brazilian Navy created SisGAZ⁴⁸, an integrated center for Command and Control designed to help monitor and protect the Blue Amazon area.

The last challenge, to foment naval cooperation, has received a new impulse in the last few years. As the Brazilian Navy is slowing trying to restructure its force, it is also strengthening naval cooperation to maintain a peaceful South Atlantic. In recent years, it has become one of the most important advocates of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZPCSA). The ZPCSA is an institutional arrangement created through the United Nations in 1986, which serves as a forum for all the 24 countries of the South Atlantic⁴⁹. The principles of the Zone are to maintain the peace and security of the South Atlantic, keeping it free from the influences of external powers.⁵⁰ While the Zone has been dormant since 2013 due to the inactivity of its member states to establish a Ministerial Meeting, Brazilian diplomats and the Brazilian Navy have mobilized efforts in bringing the Zone back to activity since 2019.

In 2019, 2020 and 2021, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Brazilian Navy organized a Symposium to discuss the ZPCSA and the Security in the South Atlantic. The latest symposium reunited Navy officials, scholars, and diplomats from Argentina, Angola, Brazil, Namibia, and South Africa. The proactivity of the Brazilian Navy in advocating for the ZPCSA is clearly connected to the diplomatic feature of navies in promoting peace, security and cooperation. For example, during the mandates of president Temer (2016 – 2018) and Bolsonaro (2020 – 2022), the BN helped the Ministry of Foreign Relations in continuing its policy of cooperation with the African countries, while the government was distancing itself from the African countries, giving preference to a foreign policy towards the United States and Europe. This has changed since President Lula's third term, that began in

⁴⁰ About US\$ 3.8 billion.

⁴¹ Brasil 2023b.

⁴² Brasil 2023a.

⁴³ Brasil 2023a.

⁴⁴ Marinha do Brasil 2020.

⁴⁵ Brasil 2023a.

⁴⁶ Brasil, 2023a.

⁴⁷ Savitz, Scott. Opportunities for the Brazilian Navy to Employ Additional Unmanned Systems. *RAND*, Aug. 2021. Available at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA700/PEA787-1/RAND_PEA787-1.pdf.

⁴⁸ Acronym for "Blue Amazon Management System".

⁴⁹ The members of ZPCSA are Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay; South Africa, Angola, Benin, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Equatorial, Liberia, Namibia, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

⁵⁰ Souza 2017.

2022. The new government increased the support for the activities of the Navy regarding its initiatives with other South Atlantic countries, especially the ones in Africa.

The BN knows that it cannot cover the entire South Atlantic Ocean alone, so it needs to cooperate with the ZPCSA members to conduct naval exercises and operations in the area. The Brazilian Navy has also been involved in technical cooperation with African countries in the past: between 1998 and 2010 the BN helped to create and train the Namibian Navy and the Namibian Marines. This is a continuous trend, since Brazil wants to expand its cooperation with African countries through international institutions, as in the case of ZPCSA.

Conclusion

The Brazilian Navy has been playing a leading role in the South Atlantic for two decades and has ambitions as big as their *Strategic Surroundings*. Yet, to maintain its presence and deter threats in the South Atlantic, the BN needs to keep the pace, continue to invest in the current programs and create new ones for the improvement of its capabilities. It is also obliged to solve the budgetary constraints to maintain and expand its force structure. Without this, it is difficult for Brazil to lead the South Atlantic navies in their effort to secure the region.

The United States and the European powers (including NATO) do not have the means to safeguard and defend the whole world against threats and conflicts. Nevertheless, they still need to engage with states in the Global South to deter common threats. In this sense, the Brazilian Navy has been trying to connect both Northern and Southern States through exercises and naval diplomacy, showing that maritime security is interconnected. However, the BN's compass must always point towards its *Strategic Surroundings* first, enhancing cooperation with Uruguay, Argentina, and the African states from the South Atlantic; second to improving the cooperation with North Atlantic countries, such as the United States, Portugal, France, and Germany.

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Global Maritime Actors & Great Power Competition: Strategic Objectives in South America

Ralph Espach

In past centuries, South America played a central role in great power competition as European empires competed over access to the resources from its mountains, forests, and seas. In the 19th century, after establishing their independence and building a partnership with – and experiencing domination from – the rising power of the United States, the importance of the South American nations in European affairs diminished. The nations of South America developed through abundant trade, and their conflicts were fought out locally with little external relevance except for capitalist investors. Marginal to the interests of the European and Asian powers, the two World Wars of the 20th Century were fought with only modest participation by South American nations. The Cold War competition affected politics and lives across South America, but the events in that region did not significantly affect the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States. Under the brief period of US hegemony in the 1990s to the 2000s, there was optimism in some circles that close relations with the superpower would bring prosperity, but regional powers like Brazil viewed Pan-American initiatives with ambivalence and very soon Washington's attention shifted elsewhere. Over the last decade the rising economic, diplomatic, and military might of China and other East and South Asian powers has altered the global balance of power and begun to affect once again the nations of South America.

South America within contemporary great power competition

The nations of South America currently play three important roles in the contemporary strategic competition that has arisen between the status quo power the United States and its liberal, democratic allies, and the rising power China and its consolidating partnership with Russia, under Putin. First and most important, as was true in the 17th and 18th centuries, the region is a **source of various valuable natural resources**, particularly minerals, oil, and food stocks (agriculture, ranching, fisheries). These imports are what China was after when it created its global Belt and Road Initiative, as they are critical to feeding the appetites and supporting the growth of its burgeoning domestic market and industries.¹ For example, China lacks agricultural lands to feed its own population. The United States does not need South America's resources as desperately, but some minerals like lithium are abundant in South America and vital to critical strategic industries. In recent years, China has moved aggressively to invest in Bolivian, Chilean, and Argentinian lithium fields. Washington wants to ensure that China does not control access to these resources to the exclusion of others. Russia imports commodities and goods from South America, but not as significantly, given that it is also a major producer of food and commodities.

A second role that the nations of South America play is that of **partners**. In this role, the scale of their importance is reversed. For the United States, these are important partners both normatively, as fellow former colonies and liberal democracies within the Americas, and also functionally, as partners in sustaining regional stability and security. Whatever crises occur in South America – and especially in its northern end and the Caribbean and Central America – quickly and significantly affect the United States through migration, disruptions in trade and finance, and possibly the emergence of an armed threat to US interests. In diplomacy, the political positions and votes in the United Nations of these

¹ Diana Roy, "China's Growing Influence in Latin America", *Council on Foreign Relations*, last modified June 15, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-influence-latin-america-argentina-brazil-venezuela-security-energy-bri>.

partners are important because, with a few exceptions, they are viewed as Western democracies that share the liberal values of the United States and its European allies. Their votes or positions in opposition can isolate Washington within its own normative community.

For China, the partnership that South American nations offer is functional. China would like them to drop recognition of Taiwan, because its reintegration into the People's Republic of China (PRC) is a principal strategic goal of its leadership. All but one South American nation – Paraguay – have done so. China fiercely desires access to the resources and commodities of the region, which it pursues through trade and investment agreements that ensure Chinese presence and access and, when possible, control over the industries themselves through Chinese ownership.² Like the United States, China seeks the diplomatic support of South American nations in rejecting the rights of the international community to involve itself or speak out against the actions of great powers on issues like human rights (China's violent suppression of its Uyghur minority) or the coercion or aggression against their neighbors (China's "Nine-dash line" claiming ownership of the entire South China Sea against international law, the Taiwan issue, Russia's invasion of Ukraine).

Russia has long historic diplomatic ties with several nations of Latin America, formed under Soviet rule as Moscow sought willing partners to help disrupt US regional interests and promote communist-type governance. Moscow strategists see a Latin America long subjected to US dominance and periodic coercion as fertile ground for strategic partnerships that can counterbalance close US ties with nations in Eastern Europe, like the Baltics and Poland and now Ukraine, who fear and despise Moscow because of its historic aggressions. Outside of Venezuela, however, Russia has not been able to form exceptional partnerships yet with any South American nation. Its market is not as promising as those of Asia or Europe, its industries and technology are relatively weak and are growing weaker under the sanctions it suffers from its invasion of Ukraine. Russia's diplomats and intelligence agents are competent and active, and they work to aggrandize its presence through social media campaigns and outlets like Russia Today (RT). However, so far Russia offers little to the developing economies or political leaders of South America except for affordable but second-rate technology and symbolic gestures. In addition, Moscow suffers as Washington does (and as Beijing does not) from its own legacy of 20th Century espionage, manipulation, and violent interventions in Latin America.

One irony in the positions of the South American nations is, that for over a century non-intervention and non-aggression have been two central tenets of their foreign policy, mostly in response to US interventions (military and otherwise) in the 1890s to the 1980s - a serious legacy of interference. However, to satisfy China and Russia, as well as other partners seeking multi-polarity in the international system (that is, the weakening of Western-led institutions created after the Second World War, and international laws in general, in order to favor the rights of powerful states to act over the rights of smaller states and individuals), some of the governments historically sensitive about non-intervention such as Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Venezuela have chosen not to criticize China's and Russia's militarized actions against their neighbors. Increasingly, they restrict their outrage over great power aggressions only to those conducted, sometimes in the distant past, by the United States or the United Kingdom. Argentina's President Fernández infamously announced his intention to allow Argentina to serve as Moscow's "gateway into South America" just days before Russia commenced its military invasion of Ukraine, which to date has led to as many as 500,000 dead or injured soldiers (Ukrainians and Russians).³

² R. Evan Ellis, "China's Role in Latin America and the Caribbean: Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues", March 31, 2022. https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/033122_Ellis_Testimony1.pdf.

³ Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes, "Troop Deaths and Injuries in Ukraine War Near 500,000, U.S. Officials Say", *New York Times*, August 18, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/18/us/politics/ukraine-russia-war-casualties.html>.

A third role that the nations of South America play in this intensifying global competition, albeit somewhat passively, is as locations of **geo-strategic importance**. The geographies and geographic positions of some nations offer special qualities relevant to space research and satellite tracking and communications, and for maritime shipping and logistics particularly related to chokepoints like the Panama Canal, the Magellan Straits, and as access points to Antarctica. Over the last decade, Russia has legally established several communications bases in South America to support the coverage of its GLONASS satellite network, which competes with the US-led GPS system and Europe's Galileo system. China has done the same, and more concerningly convinced Argentina in 2014 to allow it to build an advanced space research station in its Patagonian province Neuquen, a station operated by the Chinese military and to which the access of Argentinian scientists and policymakers is restricted, unlike other similar projects with European nations. These types of projects are likely to continue to pop up, especially when Beijing has leverage over a government desperate for financial assistance or run by corrupt regimes.⁴ One difficulty is that in many cases infrastructure projects and investments like space research stations, airports, seaports, and telecommunications towers and systems can be "dual-use" in character, that is with both commercial and military or state intelligence purposes. What makes Chinese investments special from the point of view of Washington and international observers is the Chinese law that erases the line between private companies and citizens and the Chinese state. This way, Chinese investments are always available for state exploitation, which is not the case with a port or telecommunications system run by a French or Korean or US company, which are legally independent.

Another issue that is relevant concerning these dual-use investments is the access to the vast, unexploited continent of Antarctica. Under the Antarctica Treaty signed in 1961, the continent is conserved and used only for scientific research; national claims of sovereignty are set aside. That treaty expires in 2043, however, and Russia and China have officially stated their interests in opening further access to Antarctica and its waters for exploitation. Argentina envisions itself as a bi-continental power once it can claim its share of Antarctica (although its claims overlap with those of the United Kingdom and of Chile). In the context of these tensions over the future of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, China has built several new research bases in Antarctica and is pursuing opportunities to build seaports and lay undersea telecommunications cables into Antarctica from far-southern points in Chile and Argentina. Washington and other Western governments are watching these developments, but so far are too focused elsewhere to take any action.

Maritime threats and challenges

For the nations of South America, the preoccupations and projects of the great powers are not their foremost concerns. The region is experiencing political turmoil and transformation driven by public frustrations over economic inequality, crime, and corruption driven to a frenzy by social media and opportunistic, populist political leaders. The polarization and paralysis that have seized their democratic systems incapacitates them from conducting strategic or consistent foreign policies. Governments – many short-lived and unstable – respond reactively to generous offers of Chinese assistance and technology, and try to accommodate the concerns of Washington, while focused on staving off attacks from political rivals.

The coastal nations face serious maritime challenges. Most traditionally, the nations of the Pacific coast exist constantly under the threat of earthquakes and tsunamis, for which their navies and militaries play critical roles in response. Changes in the global climate and ocean and weather patterns are affecting fish populations and migrations, disrupting maritime industries. Luckily, armed conflict and violence at sea are highly unusual, though piracy does occur among fishermen and cargo routes off of Guyana,

⁴ Ralph Espach, "A New Great Game Finds the South Atlantic", *War on the Rocks*, March 22, 2021. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/a-new-great-game-finds-the-south-atlantic/>.

Suriname, and Brazil. This does not stop the warnings of regional navies that freshwater resources, offshore oil rigs, and other maritime resources could someday attract foreign incursions. In fact, in 2020, South America's maritime security slumber since the 1982 war over the Falklands/Malvinas was startled awake by the recognition of vast foreign fishing fleets operating for months at a time off their shores and occasionally, illegally, within their 200 nm economic exclusion zones (EEZs). These fleets, mostly Chinese in origin, fish at such a scale as to threaten to destabilize or exhaust fisheries that provide Pacific coastal nations and Argentina with domestic food and export revenues.⁵ Washington seized this opportunity to emphasize the predatory nature of Chinese interests and its disregard for international laws that interfere with its political interests. In response, it has extended support to South American projects and initiatives aimed at improving these nations' maritime domain awareness and abilities to regulate their EEZs. Additionally, efforts are underway to create or expand maritime resource conservation zones to promote the sustainability of Pacific fisheries.⁶ Argentina, one of the nations most affected by this illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing (IUUF), is stymied in seeking an international response both by its close relations to Beijing and its policy to deny any recognition to the sovereignty of the Falklands/Malvinas as a self-governing overseas territory of the United Kingdom.

South American responses to great power competition

Smaller and middle-power states often try to avoid having to manage relations with a much larger power by banding together in regional groupings so they can express their interests and negotiate agreements collectively, instead of individually. Like many other regional groupings of nations, those of South America find themselves on their back heels in this surge of evermore divisive great power competition. Past regional diplomatic and economic initiatives including the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Pacific Alliance, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA) have failed to develop beyond serving as forums for periodic meetings and limited trade and customs agreements. This is in part because of domestic oppositions and instabilities that undermined ratification, but also critically because over the last 20 years the region has been increasingly divided between leftist, semi-socialist governments and centrist or conservative, populist governments, a cleavage that has weakened efforts at broad regional cooperation. At the time of writing, the members of MERCOSUR are in disagreement about how to proceed with negotiations for a trade deal with the European Union (EU), which has been under negotiation for over two decades, as well as how to approach a trade deal with China. Fed up with years of Brazilian and Argentinian protectionism, which stymies any progress in these trade deals, Uruguay seeks flexibility so it can negotiate a direct deal with China. These smaller economies could increase their leverage in negotiations over trade agreements with great power economies like China and the EU by negotiating as a group. Unable to reach agreements on terms among themselves, however, they have few options. One major challenge the countries of the region, and its various subregions (the Andean nations and the Southern Cone), face is how to cooperate or to coordinate their policies for external trade and investment so that they can make deals with external powers that are more beneficial to them.⁷

The governments of South America must also respond to efforts by Beijing and Washington to influence regional circumstances through initiatives such as the China-courting Community of

⁵ Steven Lee Myers, Agnes Chang, Derek Watkins and Claire Fu, "How China Targets the Global Fish Supply", *The New York Times*, September 26, 2022.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/09/26/world/asia/china-fishing-south-america.html>.

⁶ *The Economist*, "South American governments are trying to curb illegal fishing", October 5, 2023.
<https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2023/10/05/south-american-governments-are-trying-to-curb-illegal-fishing>.

⁷ Vinod K. Aggarwal, Ralph Espach, and Joseph S. Tulchin, *The Strategic Dynamics of Latin American Trade* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 15-28.

Caribbean and Latin American States (CELAC) or the China-dominated BRICS, and the Organization of American States (OAS), centered on Washington. In practice, none of these international organizations has much influence, largely because they have no teeth or legitimacy to act – as the OAS once did when it could encourage the US to intervene on its behalf as it did in the Dominican Republic in 1965. South American governments tend to strike their own agreements and policies toward China, the United States, and other external partners from Europe and Asia, and attempt to pursue the benefits of multi-party trade and partnership and to avoid any costs from falling too far within one camp or the other. Regarding maritime affairs, this has taken the form of increasing commercial cooperation and investments from China, including refurbishments and growth of several key seaports, while retaining strong ties with the navy of the United States, which sponsors several annual combined, bilateral and multilateral training exercises. This pattern extends beyond maritime affairs. At the risk of oversimplification, the trend of the last decade is for China to increase its economic and diplomatic partnerships across South America. Simultaneously, the United States continues to uphold its strong historic role as security partner, even though it also remains a major economic partner, and China's military has quietly expanded its presence across the region.⁸

The issue of dual-use infrastructure is a thorny one and a focus of US attention, for eventually the expansion of Chinese-built and run ports and infrastructure (including coastal buildings) near strategic ports will make those areas unusable by US and European naval partners due to Chinese espionage. Reliance on Chinese-provided telecommunication systems or submarine data cables would have a similar exclusive effect. The navies and coast guards of South America have operated since their founding almost entirely using US and NATO-sourced doctrine and concepts of operations, and with US or European equipment and standards. If, or when, one of those navies becomes aligned with China, its cooperation with its neighbors and traditional partners would be at risk.

Challenges

The challenge, therefore, facing South American nations in the maritime realm as in others is how to manage the growing interest and presence from great powers, mostly China, to their benefit without incurring significant costs to their longstanding relations with traditional US and European partners. Certainly, the recently recognized threat from IUU fishing has generated some energy for international cooperation among the Pacific coastal nations. In November 2021 Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Panama announced a new environmental protection zone⁹ expanding and linking their existing protected maritime areas to create a fishing-free zone covering 500,000 square miles. The United States and other partners are assisting these nations in building capabilities to monitor and regulate activity in that zone. Chile and Argentina have acquired new ocean patrol vessels, frigates, and aircraft to help address the IUU fishing problem. The long-term solution to this problem, however, lies in convincing China to regulate its flagged fleet of shipping vessels so that they adhere to international law and operate under international standards for safe and environmentally sustainable fishing, not to mention human rights.¹⁰

Indeed, perhaps the central problem facing South American governments is how to attract positive cooperation from the great powers on issues of importance to them such as economic development and

⁸ R. Evan Ellis, "China's Role in Latin America and the Caribbean".

⁹ Global Americans blog, "Four Latin American countries make waves with new marine reserve", November 5, 2021. <https://theglobalamericans.org/2021/11/four-latin-american-countries-make-waves-with-new-marine-reserve/>.

¹⁰ The crews of most of those squid-fishing ships are made up of South Asians who face brutal, dangerous conditions and are kept at sea sometimes for years beyond their suspect contracts with Chinese firms. Environmental Justice Foundation, *Global Impact of Illegal Fishing and Human Rights Abuse in China's Vast Distant Water Fleet Revealed*, April 5, 2022. <https://ejfoundation.org/news-media/global-impact-of-illegal-fishing-and-human-rights-abuse-in-chinas-vast-distant-water-fleet-revealed-2>.

investment, energy, climate change, and citizen security against organized crime, without being dragged into their global framework of Manichean conflict. Great power competition in the past has translated into greater relevance for South American, Central American, and Caribbean nations. In the 1930s and again during the Cold War several of these nations were able to strike favorable trade and development agreements in exchange for some level of alignment. Some governments were able to do so repeatedly, back and forth, playing the powers off one another and reaping benefits.¹¹ Others misjudged or paid a cost for eventually aligning clearly against the United States, when the Soviet Union had little power to protect them. So far, contemporary power politics have generated Chinese trade, investment, and cooperation without considerably changing the already significant role that US finance, trade, and security relations play in the continent. If that pattern continues, South America may generally suffer little from great power competition. China's appetite for risk in the region, however, and US tolerance for the actions of autocratic regimes that China supports such as in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, could make that balance increasingly difficult to maintain.

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International Cooperation: The case of the US Coast Guard

James Howe & Bill Travis

Three hundred miles off Colombia's Pacific coast, just north of the equator, a U.S. Coast Guard cutter trails behind a small, low-profile vessel. It is 5:00am, with sunrise beginning to paint the eastern horizon. The cutter runs dark, no lights showing, seeking stealth as it approaches what is believed to be a drug-laden boat. The element of surprise is crucial so that, should smugglers be aboard, the boat can be stopped before they have a chance to destroy evidence, jettison their cargo, or scuttle their vessel and send it to the ocean floor.

The action is swift. The cutter launches a high-speed interceptor boat that whisks a six-person law enforcement team alongside the suspected smugglers in less than a minute. What the team finds is surreal: a forty-foot tube-shaped craft, completely enclosed like a submarine and designed to ride with only a few inches of camouflaged hull above the waterline. The 'self-propelled semi-submersible' boat is steaming at eight knots through rolling swells, its hull continuously awash; only a small piloting viewport and rudimentary air tubes break its smooth upper hull.

A Coast Guardsman leaps from the interceptor onto the top of the semi-submersible, balancing carefully on the slippery surface to avoid being swept from the lurching hull. He bangs his fist forcefully on an entry hatch atop the viewport, repeatedly, shouting in English and Spanish for the operator to stop the boat's engines. The hatch opens and the Coast Guard team, guns drawn, quickly detains the three men operating the semi-submersible. After bringing the boat to a halt, they search its cramped interior and find, in plain view, more than three tons of high-grade cocaine, piled high in waterproof packaging. The smugglers had been traveling from the jungled coast of southwestern Colombia to a point mid-way up Mexico's Pacific coast, a twelve-day journey, where the illicit cargo would have been transferred to drug cartel members for further transport into the U.S. across the southwest land border.¹

There is more to the story than an operational success for the Coast Guard. The drug seizure would not have occurred without the direct support and cooperation of the Colombian Navy and anti-drug forces in that country, who developed the intelligence that allowed for a successful intercept. After Colombian authorities alerted their U.S. counterparts that the semi-submersible had set sail, a U.S. Navy surveillance plane, operating under the command of Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-South), in Key West, Florida, located the vessel, vectoring in the cutter. It was a multi-national, multi-service effort, and emblematic of the ongoing war on drugs that has been the linchpin of hemispheric naval relations in recent decades.

The Coast Guard cutter that made the seizure was operating nearly 4,000 miles from its homeport, highlighting how the Service's own name does not adequately describe how its expansive responsibilities extend far beyond the U.S. coastline. One of the six U.S. military services, the Coast Guard is a highly capable naval force that serves national interests around the globe, mostly in peace but also in war, and for a variety of lower-intensity constabulary, safety, and environmental protection missions. In the Western Hemisphere, with respect to the nations of the Caribbean, Central, and South America, these interests have centered since the 1970s on a primary mission: stopping the incessant flow of illegal drugs produced in these regions and shipped northward toward the U.S. mainland.

¹ Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, "U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Munro crew interdicts suspected drug smuggling vessel", U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area, June 18, 2019, accessed December 30, 2023, <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/695886/us-coast-guard-cutter-munro-crew-interdicts-suspected-drug-smuggling-vessel>.

With more than 43,000 active duty and 8,200 reserve personnel, 250 cutters, 1,600 boats, and 200 aircraft, the Coast Guard ranks in sheer size as one of the largest naval services in the world and has more people and assets than any Navy in South America except the *Marinha do Brasil*. While not a direct comparison – the Coast Guard has only a few dozen frigate-sized cutters, with much of its fleet lightly armed or equipped for non-defense missions – the Service’s core competencies range from civil regulatory matters through full-on naval warfare. The Coast Guard’s place within the U.S. government is unique, as the only military service within the Department of Homeland Security; nonetheless, it enjoys close day-to-day interaction with the U.S. Navy, other Department of Defense (DOD) forces, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and a smorgasbord of other agencies. The Coast Guard is responsible for safeguarding waterways from the nation’s ports and navigable rivers through the littoral region and exclusive economic zone to the breadth of the high seas.

In any given year, Coast Guard cutters, aircraft, and personnel deploy on various missions worldwide. International operations in 2022 were typical: a 418-foot National Security Cutter participated in Rim of the Pacific, a massive naval exercise with 26 involved nations; a seagoing buoy tender trained with Danish and French forces off the coast of Greenland;² a reserve Port Security Unit returned home after a nine-month deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba;³ and a 153-foot Fast Patrol Cutter conducted fisheries enforcement off Papua New Guinea.⁴ On a permanent basis, the Coast Guard operates maritime-safety-focused shore units in the Far East and Europe, and Liaison Officers and Attachés are assigned to DOD’s Combatant Commands and dozens of embassies and task forces across the globe. Further, Coast Guard patrol boats are deployed to Manama, Bahrain to safeguard the western Arabian Gulf, and have been a presence there since 2003 under the command of Coast Guard Patrol Forces Southwest Asia.

But it is in the fight against the transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that traffic illicit drugs that the Coast Guard has, for decades, expended the most operational effort, conducting an ongoing interdiction campaign that has required significant interaction with a host of foreign naval services throughout South and Central America and the Caribbean. TCOs are a highly sophisticated, technologically savvy, and all too frequently violent consortia with almost limitless funding, thanks to the lucrative drug and, to a lesser extent, human trafficking in which they engage. The maritime environment affords them a vast area for smuggling operations with abundant, relatively unguarded thoroughfares for their illicit trade.

In 2014, in recognition of the importance of the maritime component of the war on drugs and other security missions, the Coast Guard released its Western Hemisphere Strategy. Its content is a ten-year plan consisting of three main priorities: Safeguarding Commerce, upholding global economic security; Securing Borders, specifically the maritime borders of the United States; and Combatting Networks – the TCOs operating in the Western Hemisphere.⁵ In developing the strategy, the Coast Guard explained the intent of these objectives in a straightforward manner, speaking in terms of (1) *special teams* – units focusing on safeguarding commerce to ensure a robust Maritime Transportation System; (2) *defense* – prioritizing maritime threats to homeland security and improving a layered maritime security posture; and (3) *offense* – a forward-looking priority of taking the fight to the enemy; that is, engaging in multi-national cooperation to “identify, target, and defeat illicit networks.”⁶

² DiRenzo, Joe and Boyd, David “U.S. Coast Guard in Review”, *Proceedings* 149, no. 3 (March 2023): 80-87.

³ U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area, “Members of Coast Guard port security unit return home after 9-month deployment”, News Release, January 28, 2022, accessed March 31, 2023, <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDHSCG/bulletins/307b7ce>.

⁴ Muir, Sara, “U.S. Coast Guard conducts port visit in Port Mosesby, Papua New Guinea”, Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, August 8, 2022, accessed March 21, 2023, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/427827/us-coast-guard-conducts-port-visit-port-moresby-papua-new-guinea>.

⁵ U.S. Coast Guard, “Western Hemisphere Strategy”, September 2014.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

This multi-national cooperation, building trust and collaboration with like-minded nations throughout the Americas, requires reviewing gaps and shortfalls in current international relationships along with engaging in active efforts to recognize and cultivate new, advantageous partnerships as the capabilities of shared adversaries evolve and mature. These efforts involve intensifying existing intelligence gathering practices, including updating authorities and international policies for human intelligence gathering and the sharing of information, as well as engaging in cooperative training aimed specifically at identifying, targeting, and prosecuting TCO networks.

The term ‘force multiplier’ refers to capabilities that can be added to and employed in a military operation to increase the probability of a successful mission. Partnerships between U.S. naval forces and those of its South American neighbors increase the number of smuggling interdictions at sea by physically patrolling a greater area. They focus on the most likely areas of criminal activity, to efficiently and safely apprehend and prosecute those committing crimes at sea – with the end goal of destabilizing the drug and human trafficking trade of the TCOs. Cooperation between the sea services of the Americas is a critical force multiplier in this endeavor.

The history of maritime counter-drug operations illustrates the magnitude of the problem, and the efforts that have been undertaken to address it. Prior to the 1970s, most marijuana entering the United States originated in Mexico, until a bilateral crop eradication program decimated the Mexican supply. A secondary source of supply from large marijuana plantations in Jamaica likewise was crippled by a combined Jamaican-U.S. effort, Operation Buccaneer. Into this supply void entered Colombia, with the mountainous and relatively ungoverned territory in the Guajira Peninsula ideal for both harvesting marijuana and, with century-old smuggling networks already in place, preparing it for open-ocean transit to the United States.⁷

The rapid growth of illicit marijuana exports from Colombia caught U.S. policymakers by surprise and poorly equipped to handle the growing influx of contraband. With only a modest number of cutters, boats, and aircraft patrolling the region, smugglers were able to deliver large loads of marijuana to Florida and the Gulf Coast states, and sometimes as far north as New England, smuggled aboard fishing boats, coastal freighters, sailboats, and the occasional tugboat and barge. March 2023 saw the 50th anniversary of the Coast Guard’s first modern-era drug seizure at sea, when the fishing vessel *Big L* was intercepted off Miami with 3,000 pounds of marijuana onboard. From there, the drug war escalated almost exponentially; in 1980 alone, according to intelligence estimates, Colombian marijuana growers supplied between 7,700 and 11,300 metric tons of product to the U.S. market – roughly three-quarters of U.S. demand.⁸

The Reagan administration was the first to take firm action to disrupt these smuggling networks, more than doubling the number of cutters homeported in the Southeast, establishing the South Florida Task Force under the direction of then-Vice President Bush to coordinate federal counter-drug activity, and enlisting the services of the Department of Defense. A change to federal law authorized DOD support for counter-drug operations,⁹ and in August 1982 Coast Guard law enforcement personnel began serving aboard Navy ships, further increasing seaborne interdiction capacity, all while Navy and, less frequently, Air Force surveillance aircraft were pressed into service. Meanwhile, the administration created the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS), a coordination network with headquarters in Miami and five other cities across the nation. Within each NNBIS region, officials from a wide range of civilian law enforcement agencies and military services worked side-by-side to share intelligence and maximize operational effort. Further, the U.S. and Bahamas commenced a joint effort,

⁷ Lupsha, Peter A. “Drug Trafficking: Mexico and Colombia in Comparative Perspective”, *Journal of International Affairs* 35, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1981): 95-115.

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, National Narcotics Intelligence Consumer’s Committee, *The NNICC Report 1981: The Supply of Drugs to the U.S. Illicit Market from Foreign and Domestic Sources in 1981 (with Projections through 1985)* (Washington: DC, Drug Enforcement Administration, 1982), 52.

⁹ P.L. 97-86, 95 Stat. 1099.

Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos (OPBAT), to combat the drug smuggling endemic in the archipelago, where smugglers took advantage of limited law enforcement presence and close proximity to the United States, with the western flank of the Bahamas only 50 miles from Miami.¹⁰ Under OPBAT, U.S. Army and Coast Guard helicopters were deployed to transport Bahamian and DEA agents to suspected smuggling sites, disrupting illegal activity and reclaiming the rule of law.

At sea, huge challenges remained. Hundreds of smuggling vessels and aircraft headed north from Colombia each year, many coursing through the Yucatan Channel between Mexico and Cuba but others heading further east. Most smugglers made little effort to hide their cargo, often carrying multi-ton loads of marijuana in their cargo holds, knowing that the odds of being intercepted were extremely low. As a growing fleet of Coast Guard, Customs, as well as Navy ships and aircraft increased their presence, the smugglers adjusted their tactics, with many hiding smaller loads in secret compartments, often in fuel or water tanks, making the contraband difficult to find at sea. Likewise, law enforcement personnel adapted by employing new drug detection technologies, increasing training, sharing intelligence, and learning through experience the telltale signs that contraband was hidden aboard a vessel.

One of the most effective tools for enhancing cooperative efforts between U.S. and South American naval forces – for both counter-drug activity as well as other missions – resides in bilateral agreements. At the start of the maritime drug war, a lack of nation-to-nation collaboration severely curtailed law enforcement effectiveness. A Coast Guard cutter encountering a suspected foreign smuggling vessel in international waters – such as a Colombian or Panamanian-flagged fishing boat or coastal freighter – had no authority for enforcement action without the permission of the flag state. With no protocols in place, it could take days to obtain approval from the foreign government to board the vessel, and in some cases, access was denied. This provided time for the smugglers to enter another nation's territorial waters, dispose of their illicit cargo, or head back to their point of origin.

To address this deficiency, through the 1980s and 1990s the United States executed 29 bilateral agreements with Caribbean, Central American, and South American nations to bolster interoperability and support the goals of the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs, to which all South American nations in the prime drug trafficking zones are signatories.¹¹ Each bilateral agreement is unique, tailored to the desires of the collaborating nation.

A major development was Colombia's signing of a bilateral agreement in February 1997, which granted U.S. law enforcement forces standing approval to board Colombian-flagged vessels suspected of a smuggling activity.¹² The agreement was signed following years of increased counter-drug cooperation between the U.S. Southern Command and the Colombian Navy, which began in 1990 and was extended to Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador in 1991-1992.¹³ Since the 1990s, Colombia has been a willing and effective partner in the drug war, both with in-country eradication and maritime interdiction operations; its Navy has worked closely with U.S. and allied forces and has conducted dozens of successful at-sea intercepts, including the seizure of a number of semi-submersibles in both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean.

Through the 1980s, however, a profound change had begun to alter the interdiction equation. Cocaine, processed from coca leaves harvested high in the Andes mountains in Colombia, Peru,

¹⁰ Howe, James, "Federal Maritime Narcotics Interdiction in the Seventh Coast Guard District, 1980-1988", A Thesis in the Field of Government for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies, Harvard University, 1991, 35-47.

¹¹ United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, Vienna, December 20, 1988; Joseph E. Kramek, "Bilateral Maritime Counter-Drug and Immigrant Interdiction Agreements: Is This the World of the Future?", *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 121-161.

¹² U.S. Department of State, "Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Colombia to Suppress Illicit Traffic by Sea", effective February 20, 1997.

¹³ U.S. Southern Command, "Southcom Celebrates 60 Years of Service", accessed August 4, 2023, <https://www.southcom.mil/About/History/SOUTHCOMs-60th-Anniversary/SOUTHCOMs-60th-Anniversary-1980-1999/>.

Ecuador, and Bolivia, displaced marijuana as the predominant drug smuggled toward U.S. shores. The Andean climate is ideal for cultivating coca, and Colombia quickly became the world's leading producer of the drug. Cocaine worked to the smuggler's advantage, being far more compact and valuable than the bulkier marijuana, making it easier to hide and yielding larger profits for the drug cartels. Working with indigenous law enforcement forces, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration conducted operations to destroy cocaine processing labs, often in dense, remote jungles, and for several years a specialized Coast Guard force – the Drug Interdiction Assist Team – was added to provide riverine expertise.¹⁴

At sea, a series of tactical innovations by smugglers and interdiction forces alike launched a high-stakes game of cat and mouse, with the former increasing their use of 'go-fast' vessels to evade interdiction forces. These high-speed craft, typically thirty to fifty feet long and equipped with three or more powerful outboard engines, were capable of transiting from Colombia to the Bahamas, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, or the Lesser Antilles in half a day, carrying one or more tons of contraband and easily able to outrun Coast Guard cutters and Navy ships alike. After several years of frustration, the U.S. responded by developing an 'airborne use of force' capability, where helicopter-borne marksmen would order suspected smugglers to stop, and if rebuffed, fire warning shots and then disabling fire, employing precision rifles to shoot out the engines of the go-fast vessels – a tactic that proved highly effective.

As cocaine became preeminent in the South American drug trade, the United States continued to uprate its command and control for interdiction operations. The 1989 National Defense Authorization Act formally designated the DOD as the lead agency for detecting and monitoring potential maritime and airborne drug trafficking, with the Coast Guard assigned lead for at-sea interdiction.¹⁵ In concert with this new legal authority, then-Secretary of Defense Cheney directed DOD to create a "Caribbean Counter Narcotics Task Force, with air and maritime drug interdiction assets to combat the flow of drugs."¹⁶ This led to the establishment of joint task forces in Florida, Texas, and Panama, which were consolidated in 1994 as Joint Interagency Task Force South. As an element of U.S. Southern Command, JIATF-South has proven highly successful in marshaling U.S., Canadian, British, French, Dutch, Spanish, and other national navies and civilian law enforcement agencies to conduct intelligence gathering, transit zone interdiction, and support of South and Central American counter-drug forces.

Another trend that began in the same timeframe added a significant new challenge to interdiction forces. As multi-national counter-drug efforts in the Caribbean became increasingly effective, smuggling networks shifted west, into the Pacific Ocean, choosing the isolated rivers and ports of western Colombia, Ecuador, and sometime Peru as the departure point for their loads of cocaine. A typical smuggling venture delivered the drugs to remote locales on the west coast of Central America or Mexico. Where in the Caribbean transit zone a number of natural island-to-island choke points allowed concentrated law enforcement efforts, the wide-open expanse of the eastern Pacific added an area roughly the size of the continental United States in which smugglers increasingly operated. Some smugglers hugged the coastline on their voyage north while others steamed far out to sea to loop around interdiction forces.

In February 2000, a new initiative dubbed Operation Panama Express (PANEX) brought together the resources of the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Middle District of Florida, the Coast Guard, and a number of federal agencies to target the networks smuggling large loads of cocaine to the United States. With its origin in a 1995 FBI-DEA investigation that expanded to disrupt numerous cocaine trafficking networks,¹⁷ PANEX brought together U.S. and South American interdiction forces, with results that were immediate and spectacular: in excess of 450 tons of cocaine were seized or scuttled and more than

¹⁴ United Press International, "Coast Guard specialists operating inside Bolivia", November 28, 1989.

¹⁵ P.L. 100-456, 102 Stat. 1918.

¹⁶ Ahart, John and Stiles, Gerald, *The Military's Entry into Air Interdiction of Drug Trafficking from South America*, RAND Note N-3275-A/AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1991), iv.

¹⁷ Thomas, Kelly J., "A Model for Success in the Drug War", *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, February 2011, 1-5.

1100 individuals arrested in PANEX's first five years of operation.¹⁸ As PANEX increasingly disrupted the drug cartels, smugglers shifted more of their activity to the vast reaches of the eastern Pacific. Where in the early 2000s roughly half of the cocaine smuggled northward passed through these waters, by 2017 this amount had grown to an estimated 84 percent. Adding to the complexity was the employment of new types of low-profile or fully submersible smuggling craft, custom built on rivers in thick jungle areas. The most common form of these boats, the self-propelled semi-submersibles, were purpose-built to ride extremely low in the water and proved extremely difficult to detect.¹⁹ Interdicting such low-profile craft required new tactics and techniques by interdiction forces – tactics that are still being refined today.

Modern-day counter-drug operations involve a plethora of U.S. and allied military forces and civilian agencies coordinating with their South American, Central American, and Caribbean partners. In the 2020s, these operations continue to constitute the most important cooperative efforts between U.S. and South American naval forces. Cooperation starts with DEA, Coast Guard, CBP, and other law enforcement and intelligence personnel stationed at U.S. embassies throughout South America. With joint efforts, they work to build trusted relationships with their foreign military and law enforcement counterparts, working collaboratively to share information and to guide in-country operations. Actionable intelligence on maritime smuggling activity is passed to host-nation navies and JIATF-South, where it is matched with available detection, monitoring, and interdiction assets.

Today's JIATF-South effort, dubbed Campaign Martillo ("hammer"), sees the dedicated involvement of fourteen allied, Caribbean, as well as Central and South American nations. The amount of contraband seized at sea is staggering: more than 200,000 pounds of cocaine and smaller amounts of marijuana and other drugs are confiscated in a typical year. Nonetheless, resource limitations have hampered the overall success of the JIATF-South effort, with a majority of known smuggling voyages proceeding unencumbered due to a lack of response assets. One estimate found that 48-72 smuggling ventures occurred per month, with between 2-4 interdicting cutters and ships available to respond.²⁰ Estimates of at-sea interdiction success rates for known smuggling activity range from 25 percent to as low as 6 percent for any given year.²¹

The drug war is not the only interaction between the U.S. Coast Guard and its South American naval counterparts. Each year, the Coast Guard participates in a major multi-national maneuver, UNITAS ("unity"), which is the world's longest-running annual naval exercise, conceived in 1959 and held every year since. Led by the U.S. Navy and originally designed to stem Soviet influence in the hemisphere, UNITAS elevates warfighting proficiency and interoperability with South American and allied navies. The Coast Guard regularly contributes cutters and specialized training teams to the exercise, focusing its activities on maritime interdiction, search and rescue, and law enforcement operations with its foreign counterparts.

Each year UNITAS runs for several months, operating in the Caribbean, Pacific, and Atlantic with participation by friendly navies throughout the hemisphere. Typically, a large Coast Guard cutter deploys as part of the UNITAS naval task group, augmented by specialized training teams that share tactics, techniques, and procedures on drug interdiction and search and rescue with their South American counterparts. The multilateral training regularly includes challenging exercises such as fast roping from a helicopter to the deck of a mock armed-and-dangerous suspect vessel, to arrest 'smugglers' hiding aboard that vessel.

¹⁸ Braun, Michael, "Counternarcotics Strategies in Latin America", testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, March 30, 2006.

¹⁹ Western Hemisphere Drug Interdictions: Why Maintaining Coast Guard Operations Matters. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives, 116th Cong., 1st sess., June 4, 2019.

²⁰ Atkinson, Michael P.; Kress, Moshe and Szechtman, Roberto "Maritime Transportation of Illegal Drugs from South America", *The International Journal of Drug Policy* 39 (January 2017): 43-51.

²¹ Western Hemisphere Drug Interdictions.

While drug interdiction is a prime focus of the training, the same procedures for detecting a suspected smuggling vessel, boarding it, controlling its crew, and locating hidden contraband apply to more intense military missions, including counter terrorism and naval blockades, as well as visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) operations. Finding a stealthy, unlit vessel in the dark of night in a wide swath of ocean, intercepting the vessel in a manner that preserves the element of surprise for the interdicting cutter, safely embarking the boarding team onto the suspect vessel (potentially in the face of hostile action), and effectively guarding the crew while conducting a thorough at-sea search requires skill-sets that can be used worldwide, for military contingencies and law enforcement operations alike. This was seen in January 2023 when a U.S. Coast Guard cutter, deployed from Patrol Forces Southwest Asia, seized four tons of hashish and methamphetamines being smuggled through the Gulf of Oman.²²

On a broader scale, the U.S. Southern Command conducts a wide variety of engagement, training, exercise, and other cooperative activities with militaries across South America, led in the maritime realm by U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command (USNAVSOUTH). Headquartered in Mayport, Florida, and with the Navy's 4th Fleet providing assets, USNAVSOUTH advertises that it "serves as a main link between the U.S. Navy and the navies of South America, Central America, and the Caribbean, and is at the forefront of U.S. engagement in the Western Hemisphere."²³ Typical engagements include direct participation in counter-drug operations, humanitarian missions such as deployment of hospital ships and response to natural disasters throughout the hemisphere and in-country training alongside South American partner navies through UNITAS and other evolutions. These are supplemented by the annual PANAMAX exercise designed to assure the security of the Panama Canal, Teamwork South, a biennial U.S.-Chilean anti-surface and anti-submarine exercise, and deployments under the umbrella of the Southern Partnership Station, a mission designed to enhance military compatibility through naval and other exercises.²⁴ The interoperability extends to special forces, such as seen during the Fused Response exercise in summer 2023, between U.S. and Chilean special forces teams.²⁵ At the strategic level, three South American countries – Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina – have in recent years been granted 'Major Non-NATO Ally' status by the United States, a designation with attendant security cooperation and defense trade benefits intended to yield closer military-to-military cooperation.²⁶

For half a century, maritime drug interdiction in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific has been a top mission of the U.S. Coast Guard, with roughly one-fourth of the Service's annual operational effort dedicated to hunting down and intercepting the contraband produced abroad. The overarching counter-drug enterprise has evolved from an ad hoc operation in the 1970s to today's highly-refined and well-coordinated multi-national effort. Additional bilateral agreements have been signed in recent years, for a total of 43, including with Guyana (for the suppression of maritime and airborne drug trafficking), Ecuador (for exchanging drug-related intelligence), and Peru (for search and rescue coordination and for intelligence sharing on airborne smuggling).²⁷ To enhance the effectiveness of these agreements and speed decision-making, liaison officers from several South American navies have been assigned to JIATF-South, improving day-to-day cooperation. In the Bahamas, OPBAT has been operating

²² "USCG Cutter Makes First Drug Seizure of 2023 in Gulf of Oman", The Maritime Executive, February 1, 2023, accessed April 1, 2023, <https://maritime-executive.com/article/uscg-cutter-makes-first-drug-seizure-of-2023-in-gulf-of-oman>.

²³ U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command, "History", U.S. Fourth Fleet, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.fourthfleet.navy.mil/About-Us/History/>.

²⁴ U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command, "Exercises", U.S. Fourth Fleet, accessed August 6, 2023, <https://www.fourthfleet.navy.mil/About-Us/Exercises/>.

²⁵ Guillermo, Saavedra "Chile and SOUTHCOM Strengthen Cooperation with Exercise Fused Response," *Dialogo Americas*, June 16, 2023, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/chile-and-southcom-strengthen-cooperation-with-exercise-fused-response/>.

²⁶ Berg, Ryan C. et al, "The Future of U.S.-Brazil Security Cooperation: Opportunities Presented by Brazil's Major Non-NATO Ally Status", Report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2022.

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Agreement between the United States of America and Peru: Narcotic Drugs, Cooperating Nation Information Exchange System", effective August 16, 2005.

successfully for 41 years: service-to-service task force and individualized training is carried out regularly and day-to-day interactions between the U.S. Coast Guard and Navy and their South American counterparts continue to enhance long-lasting and trusted relationships.

Critics have argued that U.S. and South American counter-drug activities have been unsuccessful, or have led to unintended consequences, including a diffusion of smuggling networks, increased violence, and even environmental damages.²⁸ Not included in such criticism is the accrued benefit of close military-to-military collaboration between the armed forces of the hemisphere, in providing for mutual defense and for negating the influence of Russia and especially China – which constitute a major focus for the U.S. Southern Command, and which helps promote peace and stability throughout the region.

In dealing with the ongoing threat of illicit smuggling throughout the Americas, the multi-national cooperative efforts of the U.S. Coast Guard, DOD forces, JIATF-South, allied navies, their partner civilian agencies, and the naval forces of South and Central America and the Caribbean have proven a model of efficiency and effectiveness. With a well-functioning command and control structure and a bevy of bilateral counter-drug agreements in place, what is needed for greater success are the additional detection, monitoring, and interdiction assets that would bring deeper hurt to the transnational criminal organizations that bedevil the Western Hemisphere. Supplying such additional resources requires policy decisions that, as of this writing, have yet to be made.

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Neighboring Maritime Strategy: Interconnectivity between Mexico and South America

Christian Ehrlich

Introduction

On September 8, 2022, a small boat traveling at 197NM southwest of Puerto Chiapas, in southern Mexico, became the target of a military operation conducted by Mexican Naval forces. Although the skiff looked like an innocent fishing boat, it was far from it: onboard, an amount of 1.7 tons of cocaine worth 20 million US-dollars was being transported by an eight-men crew from South American origins. When the skiff was spotted by the Navy's AS565 Panther helicopter, it became evident to the smugglers that they would not be able to deliver their precious cargo.

A similar operation had taken place off the coast of Michoacan state – also on Mexico's Pacific – the month before. On August 3, the Mexican Navy deployed air, naval and marine forces to track, chase and detain a skiff carrying 1.6 tons of cocaine and 432 liters of gasoline. A video released by the Navy showed the small boat evading the Defender Interceptor Boat, which finally managed to detain the smugglers, also from South American origin.

Although these operations may seem spectacular, they are common in Mexico's maritime domain. The Eastern Pacific Drug Vector, as it is internationally known¹, serves as the transit lane for drugs coming from South America – mainly Ecuador and Colombia – to the US market. Once these drugs reach Mexico's Exclusive Economic Zone, they are transported to shore to continue their voyage north to the US-Mexico border. For instance, despite not being in Central or South America, Mexico's geographic position necessarily means that the Country's Maritime Security is deeply related to threats and risks that originate more than a thousand nautical miles further south.

It is not only in the Pacific where Mexico's Maritime Security challenges are to be confronted. The Gulf of Mexico, where key industrial and logistic hubs are located, is also the scene of such incidents. Take for instance the case of the Delphi Ranger, a Bahamas-flagged cargo vessel that was seized by Mexican Marines in the port of Altamira, Tamaulipas state, in 2019. Acting on intelligence provided by US counter narcotic agencies, the Mexican forces located 120 kilograms of cocaine inside the ship, which remained in custody for over three years. That same year, another cargo vessel – the UBC Savannah – arrived at the same port from Barranquilla, Colombia with 225 kilograms of cocaine. The ship's captain remained detained for over two years before being cleared by a Mexican judge on drug trafficking charges. Yet, illicit drug smuggling is only one of a series of threats that link Mexico's Maritime Security with its southern neighbors. For instance, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (IUUF) deserves particular attention, as fleets from Asia have become a growing concern to countries from Chile to Mexico, whose fish stocks are being depleted.

As can be seen, much of what happens in Mexico's Maritime Domain – on both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans – is intertwined with Central and South America's Maritime Security. Hence the purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between Mexico's Maritime Security and that of its southern fellow nations. In doing so, this text analyzes the main features of Mexico's Maritime Domain, the role of the Mexican Navy and the threats and risks that endanger the country's security on

¹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence (2022). 2022 Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community.

the seas. As a conclusion, a brief set of ideas is proposed, in light of what this author considers as future imperatives in terms of naval capabilities and international cooperation.

Mexico's maritime domain and the evolution of the Mexican Navy

When Mexican third graders are told to draw a map of their Country, they would – at least theoretically – come about with a picture of the 1.9 million square kilometers of territory. Yet that image would only show the landmass of the Republic, leaving aside the vast, albeit unnoticed, maritime domain. But kids are not to blame for this, since Mexican strategic culture has long left the country's sea riches – and responsibilities – in oblivion.

Yet history can hardly deny the fact that, from a geographic point of view, Mexico's maritime domain is rather huge: it encompasses 3.1 million square kilometers of Exclusive Economic Zone (the world's 13th), 11 thousand kilometers of coastlines and 5 thousand square kilometers of insular territory. Seventeen out of Mexico's 32 states are maritime in nature, for they are either located on the Pacific or Atlantic littorals. According to official figures, roughly 60 million Mexicans live in a coastal state and 20 million are located directly on the shores.²

Another important feature of Mexico's maritime domain is the key relevance of its 16 international ports. In 2022, close to 300 million tons of cargo passed through a series of terminals located on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. 56 million tons were made up by containerized cargo while 108 million tons were directly related to the oil and gas industry. The ports of Altamira and Veracruz on the Atlantic, and Manzanillo and Lazaro Cardenas on the Pacific, are definitively the most important national gateways to the world when it comes to maritime commercial freight: 6 million (out of a total of 8 million) TEUs³ are transported through those terminals alone.⁴

Considering these numbers, one would expect Mexico to pay more attention to its naval capabilities. Nevertheless, since its very beginnings as an independent nation in the early 18th century, and despite a series of invasions by foreign powers that came precisely from the sea (from Spain, France, and the US as recent as 1914), the Country has maintained a modest navy mainly oriented to constabulary duties. Analyzing the evolution of the Mexican Navy – although briefly – is of key relevance to address the Nation's current maritime security threats and risks.

Established in 1821 at the dawn of Mexico's independence, the Mexican Navy remained a small and under-resourced force for much of its early history. This was mostly due to the country's, primarily internal, security challenges, such as social unrest, political upheaval, and secessionism in certain provinces.⁵ Despite the foreign invasions previously mentioned, the Mexican government focused its military resources on these domestic issues. However, the Second World War marked a turning point as Mexico recognized the importance of a strong naval force in the face of global geopolitical shifts. It is because of the War that the government decided to split the Ministry of War and Navy in two separated offices. The Navy thus got its own cabinet-level ministry, a structure that remains today.

After the War, the Mexican Navy began to construct a constabulary force focused almost exclusively on coastal patrol, fisheries control, and limited search and rescue operations. To this end, Mexico acquired decommissioned ships from the United States Navy, which would serve as the pillar of the

² Emilio Vizarratea, "Thoughts for the Development of a Mexican Maritime Strategy", in *Mexico and the Sea: Relevance of the Nation's Sea Power*. (Mexico: Secretariat of the Navy, 2020), 213.

³ Twenty-foot Equivalent Units.

⁴ "Statistics on Mexico's Ports 2022", las modified April 23, 2023. <https://www.gob.mx/puertosymarinamercante/acciones-y-programas/informe-estadistico-de-los-puertos-de-mexico-2022>.

⁵ Raul Benitez, Craig Deare; "Mexican Military Culture" (CASEDE, 2022). 8-9, <https://www.casede.org/index.php/biblioteca-casede-2-0/autores-casede/raul-benitez-manaut/684-mexican-military-culture-2021/file>.

fleet until the very end of the 1980s. During the Cold War years, the Navy maintained a constabulary doctrine in line with the country's foreign policy principles and the significant asymmetry of power vis a vis the United States. As a result, the Navy's power projection capabilities remained quite limited.

Yet things began to change in the late 1970s and early 1980s, thanks to two main strategic factors: on the one hand, huge oil reserves were discovered in the Gulf of Mexico and on the other, the signing of the UNCLOS Treaty, which extended the legal responsibilities of the Nation towards its maritime domain. The Navy acquired two former US Navy destroyers (Gearing Class) and 22 coastal patrol vessels manufactured in Scotland, followed by six Offshore Patrol Vessels from Spain (Uribe Class) and the tall ship ARM Cuauhtémoc. It is safe to say that, by the mid 1980s, the Navy had embarked in a modernization process intended to boost its constabulary doctrine while adopting some new operational concepts. As such, the use of embarked Bolkow Bo 105 helicopters helped the Navy to develop a limited-but-relevant force multiplier for maritime security and SAR operations.

By the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the so-called “Peace Dividend” of the early 1990s, the world began to focus on nontraditional security threats such as terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, protection of natural resources and migration.⁶ This paradigm shift meant that countries around the world, including Mexico, would refocus their defense budgets to address such issues while developing softer – or at least multipurpose – capabilities. For Mexico, although these security threats were not new at all, the new international security agenda strengthened the idea – already engrained in the Country's naval doctrine – that the most pressing security threats and risks, from a maritime standpoint, came precisely from such asymmetric phenomena.

Well into the 1990s, the Navy moved forward increasing its shipbuilding capabilities and, drawing lessons from the Uribe Class of the previous decade, designed and built four Holzinger Class OPV. With the introduction of this new class of patrol vessels, the Navy laid the foundations for the construction of more modern, capable ships such as the Sierra and Durango Classes (four units each). Nevertheless, although the Navy kept its operational doctrine, which almost exclusively focused on constabulary missions, it is worth noting that it acquired six decommissioned frigates from the US Navy. Two Bronstein Class and four Knox Class began sailing under the Mexican Flag by the late 1990s and, despite being clearly outdated for modern high-end scenarios, provided the Navy with a limited ocean-going capability.

The events of September 11, 2001, marked a shift in the international security paradigm, akin to the changes witnessed in the late 1980s. Suddenly, the Navy found itself exploring and planning for security scenarios that would take place in the maritime domain. The possibility of a terrorist attack against Mexican oil and gas infrastructure -mainly in the Gulf of Mexico- forced the General Staff to acquire certain capabilities that were simply non-existent at the time. For this reason, two Aliya Class missile corvettes were acquired from Israel, and a series of CASA C-212 Aviocar cargo planes were transformed as airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms. The Aliya corvettes (locally known as Huracán Class) provided the Navy with real – albeit limited – Anti Surface Warfare (ASuW) capabilities (both were armed with four Gabriel MKII anti-ship missiles). The new security paradigm paved the way for the Security and Prosperity Alliance for North America, a cooperation scheme that formalized the already strong partnership between the Mexican Navy and its North American counterparts.

When Felipe Calderón assumed the presidency of Mexico in 2006, he faced the challenge of confronting drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) that had been operating with relative impunity in various parts of the country⁷. To combat this highly complex and volatile phenomenon, Calderón deployed the Mexican Armed Forces to take on the criminal syndicates. The Navy reorganized its

⁶ Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 187-255.

⁷ Trejo, Guillermo. Ley, Sandra. (2020). Votes, drugs and violence: the political logic of criminal gangs in Mexico. Cambridge.

deployment on land and greatly expanded the capabilities of its Marines, who would become the most efficient, respected, and reliable military force in the Mexican State in a short time.

According to Craig A. Deare,⁸ the war on organized crime brought US-Mexico cooperation on national security and defense to new levels. The bilateral relationship benefited from the initial trust generated between the two neighbors in the 1990s and after the terrorist attacks of 2001. Cooperation between the two countries resulted in the expansion and acquisition of naval capabilities, especially in two key areas: intelligence and maritime domain awareness systems. During the Calderón presidency, two main cooperation schemes were put into effect: the North American Maritime Security Initiative (NAMSI) and the expanding role of the Mexican Navy within the US-led Joint Interagency Task Force South (JITF-S).

Regarding the latter, the Mexican Navy added aircraft (CN 235 Persuader) for maritime surveillance, with units proven to be ideal for patrolling the Exclusive Economic Zone. Intelligence sharing and real-time cooperation with American security agencies – mainly DEA, Customs and Border Protection Agency and Northern and Southern Commands – focused on the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. However, just as in previous administrations, Mexican naval doctrine continued adopting new capabilities while preserving its constabulary nature. The Oaxaca-class OPV project – of which eight have been built – continued its course well into president Peña Nieto's administration (2012-2018), as well as other, even more ambitious, shipbuilding initiatives.

To supplement the means for the control over the Exclusive Economic Zone, the Mexican Navy's POLA project (Long Range Patrol Vessel), based on the DAMEN SIGMA 10514 frigate, was a significant initiative that represented a major step towards enhancing the country's national defense capabilities. This multipurpose frigate project, which initially aimed to construct eight units, is the most ambitious naval construction project in Mexico's history.

The POLA frigate project, albeit suspended since 2019 once a new administration took office, is a strategic investment in the Mexican Navy's future, enabling it to perform a variety of missions in the postmodern naval framework,⁹ such as inclusive maritime control, peacekeeping operations, maritime security, and international humanitarian assistance. Additionally, the POLA project allows Mexico to pave the road to an effective protection and dissuasive scheme in the Exclusive Economic Zones as never before, giving the country a better position to deal with traditional naval warfare missions as well as nontraditional ones.

Mexico's Maritime Security Threats

Having reviewed the evolution of the Mexican Navy over the past decades, it becomes self-evident that the most pressing threats to the Country's maritime domain have been non-traditional in nature. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that, given the low availability of public data, it is quite complex to elaborate a comprehensive picture on Mexico's maritime security threats.¹⁰ Thus, information from the media, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), think tanks and foreign agencies is of tremendous help to identify the various phenomena that relate to Mexico's so-called "maritime interests".¹¹ These mainly consist of drug trafficking and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in the Pacific; and

⁸ Craig Deare, *A Tale of Two Eagles: The US-Mexico Bilateral Defense Relationship Post-Cold War*. (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 245-330.

⁹ Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the 21st. Century*, (New York, 2013). 32-44.

¹⁰ Adriana Avila-Zuñiga Nordfeld and Dalaklis D. "Repercussions of a Weak Ocean Governance and a Non-existent Maritime Security Policy: The Resurgence of Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea in the Gulf of Mexico." *Journal of International Maritime Safety, Environmental Affairs and Shipping*, (5:2), 73-84.

¹¹ Captain Francisco Hernandez, "Mexico's Maritime Interests," in *Mexico and the Sea: Relevance of the Nation's Sea Power*. (Mexico: Secretariat of the Navy, 2020), 156-157.

piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Atlantic (mainly in the Bay of Campeche in the Southern Gulf of Mexico).

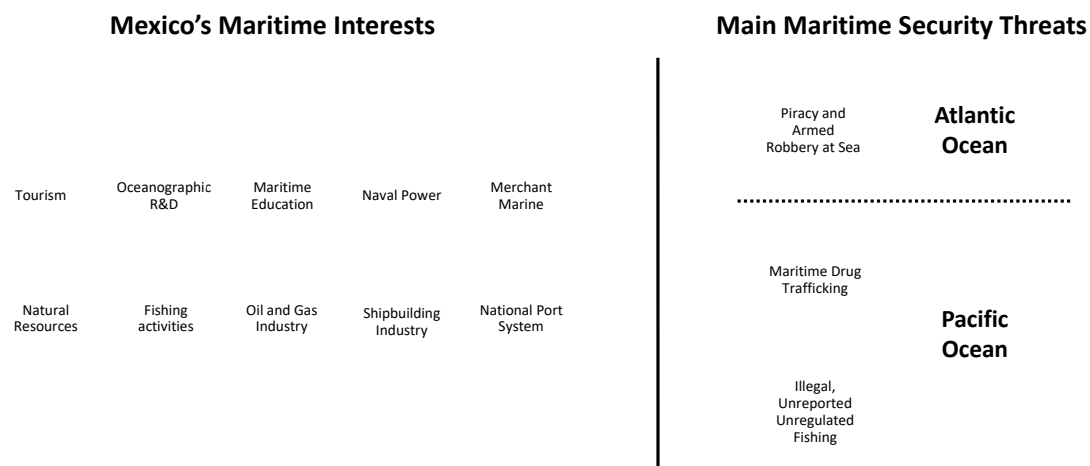


Figure 1. Mexico's Maritime Interests and related Maritime Security Threats. Source: own, based on Captain Francisco Hernandez, "Mexico's Maritime Interests", in Mexico and the Sea: Relevance of the Nation's Sea Power (Mexico: Secretariat of the Navy: 2020), 156-157.

Among the aforementioned threats, maritime drug trafficking is by far the most publicly known phenomenon affecting Mexico's maritime domain, especially in regard to cocaine transportation from the shores of Ecuador and Colombia to Mexico's coasts – the so-called Eastern Pacific Corridor.

According to Mexican Government sources and media reports, the cocaine is shipped at either the Colombian ports of Buenaventura and Tumaco or the Ecuadorean ports of Esmeraldas, San Lorenzo, and Puerto Rico. After an approximately ten-day journey on the sea (it depends on the route) in skiffs, the drug is offloaded in the vicinity of Mexico's Exclusive Economic Zone and left afloat with GPS-attached locators, where another crew would pick it up and transport it to the shores. Although there is not sufficient information on the matter, it is safe to assume that fishing boats operating in the zone might be used as some sort of "maritime drug militia".

Although it is certain that an important number of drugs remains undetected, recent cocaine seizures prove the importance of conducting maritime counter-narcotics operations: according to the US Coast Guard, an average of 150 metric tons of cocaine was prevented from reaching the market between 2019 and 2020.¹²

From an international cooperation point of view, Mexico's efforts to tackle maritime drug trafficking are mainly supported by two naval schemes, the Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JITF-S) and the North American Maritime Security Initiative (NAMSI). While the former is a joint security structure comprised of several US services and is based in the state of Florida (the United States) the latter is a cooperative framework established in 2008 between Mexico, the US, and Canada. NAMSI focuses on intelligence sharing, coordination for naval operations – especially maritime interdiction – and capacity building through academic courses and exercises. Besides these specific schemes, whose evident center of gravity is the United States, the Mexican Navy maintains constant communication with other regional navies, especially the Colombian one. To enhance this cooperation, a Mexican liaison officer serves in the Cartagena based International Maritime Center for the Analysis of Drug Trafficking and a regular intelligence sharing is carried out between the naval general staffs of both nations.

Although less known, another drug trafficking route exists, that comes directly from East Asia. In this case, the illicit cargo is attached to the hull of large container and bulk carrier vessels, well below

¹² United States Coast Guard, "Annual Performance Report". https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/documents/budget/FY_2020_USCG_APR.pdf.

the waterline, just to be recovered upon arrival at a destination port – or even before – by divers. Since more than 8 thousand cargo ships arrive every year at Mexico's Pacific ports, detection and removal of these "sea chests" by the authorities remain an almost-impossible task.

Also in the Pacific, another phenomenon that affects the stability of the seas is Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUUF). As in many of the challenges related to maritime security in Mexico, there is little officially sanctioned information to get a clear idea of the phenomenon. However, the work carried out by national and international Non-Governmental Organizations makes it possible to elucidate the size of the problem to a certain extent. It is estimated that between 45 percent and 90 percent of the total fishing in Mexico comes from illegal activities, mostly in the northwest region of the country – especially in the periphery of the Baja California Peninsula and within the Sea of Cortez.¹³ However, it would be wrong to assume that illegal or unregulated fishing is solely and exclusively Mexican in nature. According to information from the Global Fishing Watch organization, there is evidence that Asian fishing fleets – mostly Chinese – operate in the vicinity of the Mexican Exclusive Economic Zone on a constant basis. According to Vanda Felbab, "the role of the Mexican Navy will be vital to face the threat of the massive illegal fleet of the People's Republic of China".¹⁴ This phenomenon is undoubtedly shared by other countries on the continent, especially Ecuador, Peru, and Chile, who have raised their concern denouncing the predatory activities of these distant fleets in their seas. As is the case with maritime drug trafficking, illegal or unregulated fishing by Asian states in the seas of the Americas is a clear example that the threats to maritime security in the region must be faced jointly, systematically, and permanently by the affected countries.

In the Atlantic, phenomena related to maritime security present somewhat different characteristics from those observed in the Pacific. In this sense, the main phenomenon of interest is piracy and armed robbery at sea, particularly in the Campeche Sound, south of the Gulf of Mexico, where at least 250 oil platforms are concentrated. The intense activity of the oil and gas industry in the area is the main incentive for criminal organizations - sometimes related to local fishing communities - to carry out these types of criminal activities. In fact, there is evidence that some employees of the oil companies provide valuable information to these groups, such as the location of valuable facilities, or high-tech equipment with substantial commercial value.

While some international organizations aim to portray the situation in the Campeche Sound as comparable to that in the Gulf of Guinea, the reality is that they are fundamentally different. There exists a discrepancy between the reports published by merchant mariner associations, national and international shipping companies, and the Mexican authority, highlighting the challenges in accurately understanding the phenomenon. While the Navy reported 45 attacks between 2018 and 2020, the International Federation of Maritime Transport Workers placed the figure at 16 monthly attacks.¹⁵ In 2020, following an alert issued by the US Department of Transportation¹⁶ about the growing risk of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the area, the Mexican Navy launched Operation *Refuerzo*, a certainly positive tactical response.

This is important because it sheds light on a rather little-known operational premise: the various phenomena that affect the country's maritime security - such as those mentioned above - are confronted on a tactical basis and not a comprehensive Maritime Security Strategy that allows for defining clear ends, ways, and means (and verifying indicators). If the Mexican Navy continues to face these

¹³ Andrés Cisneros-Montemayor, Miguel A. Cisneros Mata, Sarah Harper and Daniel Pauli. "Extent and Implications of IUU Catch in Mexico Marine Fisheries". *Marine Policy*. Vol. 39. (May 2013): 283-288.

¹⁴ Vanda Felbab, "Illegal Fishing in Mexico and Policy Responses". Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/09/14/illegal-fishing-in-mexico-and-policy-responses/>.

¹⁵ Stable Seas, "State of Maritime Piracy", <https://www.stableseas.org/post/state-of-maritime-piracy-2020>, 25.

¹⁶ United States Department of Transportation, "2020-008 Southern Gulf of Mexico Vessel Attacks". <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/msci/2020-008-southern-gulf-mexico-vessel-attacks>.

phenomena as isolated threats, it will hardly turn the tide on a phenomenon of great relevance to Mexico's national security.

Thus, understanding the Mexican naval operational doctrine is vital to elucidate the challenges ahead and their impacts in terms of capabilities and international cooperation schemes.

Mexican Navy Operational Doctrine: geopolitics and future challenges

To understand the way in which the Mexican Navy organizes and develops its naval operations, it is important to contextualize the country's maritime domain within the regional geopolitical scenario. Mexico is a country with a double geopolitical nature: on the one hand, it belongs to North America, where the relationship with the United States is of vital strategic importance. On the other hand, the Mexican nation is closely linked to Central and South America, through historical, cultural and, to a certain extent, ideological ties. As established in the 2012-2018 National Security Program, the first of its kind in Mexico, this duality places the country in an extremely complex condition, where the North American geography and the specific weight of Washington are a true center of gravity, whereas the Latin American link still plays an important role, at least in national cultural identity.

However, the influence of the relationship with the United States is so great that it ends up imposing itself on the moment in which Mexico prioritizes its national security and defense strategies. This does not mean that there is no cooperation in the maritime security sector, for example, with nations like Colombia, as noted previously; or that there is no brotherly relationship between the Navy of Mexico and that of Peru or Chile. However, in practical terms, and despite the fact that a good part of the risks and threats to Mexican maritime security originate in the waters of the South American Pacific and Atlantic, there is currently no institutionalized cooperation on the matter. In this sense, cooperation in maritime security focuses on agreements with Washington, particularly with its national security agencies, the US Navy and its Coast Guard, as mentioned before.¹⁷

As for a Mexican national strategy, the Naval Operational Concept defines the geographical scope of air, land, and maritime naval resources, on three main operating spaces: the coastal zone, the Exclusive Economic Zone, and the subsequent maritime space (or high seas). According to the concept, the navy assigns its maritime security operations primarily to the first two zones. These are the areas where most of its capabilities are allocated, such as 15 Coastal Patrol Vessels, 30 Ocean Patrol Vessels and about 50 interceptor boats. The reorganization of the territorial commands of the Navy in 2022, on which these missions depend, evolved around the creation of 13 Naval Regional Commands, 17 Naval Zone Commands, 6 Naval Sectors and a High Command Headquarters in Mexico City.

For operations on the high seas, the Navy maintains two *Fuerzas Navales* (Naval Forces, one per coast) in charge – at least in theory – of fulfilling the nation's foreign defense mission as mandated by the Constitution. It is important to highlight that, the Naval Forces did have relatively capable vessels in the 1990s and early 2000s, which mostly consisted of former Knox and Bronstein class frigates transferred from the US Navy, as mentioned in chapter two. However, as of 2023, the Navy lacks the minimum means or capabilities for high-end naval warfare operations.

From 2012 to 2018, the Navy came up with an ambitious project that would lay the foundations for a much more modern, capable force. This project primarily included the construction of eight DAMEN SIGMA 10514 multipurpose frigates in the Navy's shipyards and planned for the subsequent acquisition of logistics support vessels that would eventually replace the two aging Newport Class LSTs, whose operational capabilities were already compromised. Considering Basil Germond's approach towards

¹⁷ It must be said that the Mexican Navy does take part in various regional naval exercises on a common basis, such as UNITAS or Tradewinds, yet practically all of these drills are organized by the United States.

naval hierarchies, the Mexican Navy intended to evolve from a rank two to a rank three navy¹⁸ hence not only concentrating on constabulary duties but also embracing limited projection capabilities within multinational military forces.

Nevertheless, the new administration that came to power in December 2018, cancelled all modernization and shipbuilding projects, thus driving the two Naval Forces' warfighting capabilities to almost zero. Out of the eight frigates, only one was finally commissioned – *ARM Reformador*, later renamed as *ARM Juarez* – albeit with *fitted-for-but-not-with* weapons systems. Not only was the frigate program canceled but the construction of more OPVs and CPVs too, thus limiting the Force's ability to perform constabulary missions, which is the true operational core of the Force.

As can be concluded, the fate of the POLA project and the subsequent halting of the Navy's operational doctrine evolution shed light on the challenges that the nation faces in terms of sea power capabilities. According to this author, the very first challenge ahead has to do with the Force's readiness to conduct policing operations, which has been its core mission for decades. In this regard, there is an urgent need to replace many of the OPVs and CPVs that entered service almost 40 years ago. It is self-evident that, should this trend continue in the coming years, the Navy would reduce its ability to tackle maritime security threats, such as drug trafficking, IUUF or piracy, to a minimum, also affecting its capacity within current international cooperation schemes, such as NAMSII.

The Oaxaca Class OPV and the Stan Patrol CPV shipbuilding projects should resume as soon as resources are available. Restarting the frigate program would allow the Navy to develop new operational concepts, conduct modern naval operations – perhaps even taking part in multinational ones – and to foster a *limited-but-scalable* naval defense scheme.

Another challenge that the Navy faces, relates to multi-domain operations, hence leveraging cyber and space-based technologies that would increase the Force's overall operational success. In addition, fostering a joint-operations doctrine with both the Army and Air Force would positively affect the country's capabilities to address current and future security imperatives.

Yet resuming shipbuilding projects or fostering military jointness is not enough, for the Navy faces a much more strategic challenge ahead: sea blindness. In this regard, as previously noted in chapter two, the country's history has neglected the importance of the oceans practically since the Nation became independent more than 200 years ago. Paraphrasing Mahan,¹⁹ positively altering the character of both the people and government towards the sea will prove essential to the Navy's future, and that is not an easy task. To begin with, naval leaders should actively engage in public discussions to highlight the relevance of the sea to Mexico's economy (both in terms of commerce and natural resources), the role of the country as a responsible international security partner and the geopolitical imperatives of being a two-ocean nation that borders with the world's strongest superpower.

It would also be necessary to come up with a comprehensive, long-term Maritime Policy, jointly designed and published with the various stakeholders whose activities and responsibilities relate to the sea. Such Policy should envision a geographical Mexican Maritime Strategic Concept (M2SC²⁰), which outlines the geostrategic imperatives of the Nation's interests well beyond its immediate vicinity. The Maritime Policy should also serve as a guiding light in terms of international cooperation with other nations, especially those in the Americas that face similar – if not the same – threats and risks to their ocean domains.

Although it is self-evident that the relation with the US is – and always will be – the defining feature of Mexico's naval international cooperation, increasing maritime security cooperation with South

¹⁸ Basil Germond, "Small Navies in Perspective", in *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*, ed. Michael Mulqueen, Deborah Sanders and Ian Speller. (England: Ashgate), 42-43.

¹⁹ Kevin D. McCranie. *Mahan, Corbett, and The Foundations of Naval Strategic Thought*. (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2021). 22-28.

²⁰ Abbreviation proposed by the author.

American countries will prove essential, as almost all of the security threats and challenges that Mexico faces originate in South American waters.

As a conclusion, the Mexican Navy faces a crossroads: either it remains a limited force oriented solely to conducting small-scale constabulary operations, or it endorses a much more strategic vision to evolve into a postmodern navy in accordance with the Nation's huge maritime domain and economic opportunities. The answer lies in the hands of the political elite and, mostly, the leadership within the Navy.

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Maritime Security Issues

Maritime Infrastructure: Challenges and international influence in South America

Ignacio Mardones

South America is a maritime continent. Despite its immense land mass, which extends over 27 million km², maritime transport dominates the foreign trade of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) with over 80 percent.¹ On closer inspection, however, this is hardly surprising; after all, the countries are connected to the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans through more than 70,000 km of coastline.²

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projections indicate an annual GDP growth in LAC of 1.8 percent by 2023 and 2.1 percent by 2024, above the average of the world's advanced economies with a projected 1.2 percent and 1.4 percent, indicating that the region is returning to the post-pandemic growth path.³ In line with the above, the Chilean Public Enterprise System (SEP), in 2022, pointed out that the favorable growth scenario for LAC generated a positive impact on the port sector. Subsequently, several infrastructure improvement initiatives have been established in recent years after the sector was identified as "one of the economic engines enhancing progress in Latin America, a market in constant development and which offers great possibilities for expansion and growth in the future".⁴

The development of Latin America is intricately linked to the global trend of utilizing coastal areas for transportation, trade, tourism, and recreation. This trend has led a significant portion of the population to reside in coastal cities and settlements. It is expected that by 2030, two-thirds of the world's population will live within 160 km of the coast.⁵ Due to its particular geography and the development of ports and road connections, which enables a bioceanic connection, this effect is even greater in Latin America.

Due to the high population-density in coastal areas, climate change will have a comparatively strong impact on LAC. Manifested through coastal flooding as a result of sea level rise, coastal erosion and increased storm surges, it will have a negative effect on maritime infrastructure. Studies of vulnerability and risk in ports conducted by the Ministry of Environment of the Government of Chile indicate an increase in port entry restrictions and the average number of hours of closure due to adverse weather conditions in the region.⁶

Additionally, in times of strategic competition between superpowers and as part of its "Belt and Road" initiative, China has increased its investments in the Latin American region over the last 20 years to 400 billion US-dollars.⁷ Mostly Chinese state-owned companies are developing and controlling

¹ WorldAtlas, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-the-largest-exclusive-economic-zones.html>.

² CEPAL, "Efectos del cambio climático en la costa de América Latina y el Caribe; Dinámicas, Tendencias y Variabilidad Climática", https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/3955/4/S1500961_es.pdf, septiembre 2015.

³ FMI, "Informes de Perspectivas de la Economía Mundial", <https://www.imf.org/es/Publications/WEO/Issues/2023/01/31/world-economic-outlook-update-january-2023>, enero 2023.

⁴ SEP, "Inversión Portuaria en Latinoamérica: un salto a la competitividad futura de la industria", <https://www.sepchile.cl/2022/05/18/inversion-portuaria-en-latinoamerica-un-salto-a-la-competitividad-futura-de-la-industria/>, mayo, 2022.

⁵ Patel, Ronak B. y Polatty, David, P. 2018 "Climate Change and Urbanization Challenges to Global Security and Stability", Joint Force Quarterly 89 (abril) (Washington: National Defense University Press) pp. 93-98.

⁶ Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, "Determinación del riesgo de los impactos del cambio climático en las costas de Chile", Volumen 5: Vulnerabilidad y riesgo en puertos, <https://cambioclimatico.mma.gob.cl/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2019-10-22-Informe-V05-CCCostas-Puertos-Rev1.pdf>, 22 de octubre de 2019.

⁷ BBC Mundo. "Los 3 pilares de la expansión china en América Latina y el Caribe en dos años de pandemia", <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-59823320>.

projects in a number of industries, especially in the technology, transportation and energy sectors in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela.⁸ In addition to the above, China shows great interest regarding the resources offered by the Antarctic Ocean and Antarctic territory, especially in view of a future revision of the *status quo* of Antarctica.

The projected growth and development through large maritime spaces at its disposal, the concentration of the population in coastal cities, the effects of climate change and foreign influence through large investments, pose a series of challenges to Latin American states regarding the safety, security and development of maritime infrastructure. These challenges to critical infrastructures will most certainly become even greater in the future. This chapter will provide a more in-depth analysis of the factors, projects and implications that South American countries must face, and, from Chile's perspective, the challenges that these entail.

Maritime Infrastructure and its political-economic relevance

In his book "Seapower – A guide for the twenty-first century" Geoffrey Till indicated, that the maritime success of a state depends largely on achieving the best economic and strategic use of the four attributes of the sea. He defines these attributes as follows: "the sea as a resource", "the sea as a medium of transportation and exchange", "the sea as a medium for information and the spread of ideas", and finally "the sea as a medium for dominion".⁹ All these attributes require an adequate infrastructure that is safe, accessible, sustainable and resilient to climate change. The resulting need for a significant injection of resources is one reason why South America welcomes foreign investments in maritime infrastructure. This is especially relevant considering that several governments are going through deep economic crises or are simply unable to provide financial support for projects of this extent. This has for example been the case in Argentina and Ecuador, as well as in Venezuela, which additionally faces internal political instability.

Political-economic alliances are then established for mutual benefit. China, as the biggest investor, on the one hand provides the infrastructure, such as the port projects of Chancay in Perú or Rio Grande in Argentina and enables further economic growth in the region. On the other hand, the country gains access to specific strategic sectors of the countries in the region, expands its global influence and satisfies its geopolitical interests.

In this sense, the maritime infrastructure takes on special importance, since, in the words of British naval history professor Andrew Lambert:

Maritime states do not control the oceans; maritime trade carrying food, fuel and raw materials is in effect unguarded, usually beyond the control of nation states. Many countries rely on a combination of international law and shared interest, rather than naval force, to ensure unimpeded movement of ships by other nations or non-state actors.¹⁰

If there is freedom to transport cargo across the sea, one could ask whether it is especially relevant to control the maritime terminals from which cargo departs and arrives. However, the confinement and closure of the world's largest port, Shanghai, carried out by the Chinese authorities in April 2022 to deal with the spread of the omicron variant of COVID-19 served as a wake-up call to exactly that question. The Chinese decision caused global consequences, leading to a congestion in supply chains, a decrease

⁸ Athenalab, "Puerto de Chancay en Perú y su impacto geopolítico en Chile", <https://athenalab.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/D15-Puerto-Chancay.pdf>.

⁹ Till, Geoffrey. "Seapower. A guide for the twenty-first century". Third edition, Oxon, Routledge, 2013, pp.6-14.

¹⁰ Lambert, Andrew. "Seapower States, maritime culture, continental empires and the conflict that made the modern world", Yale University Press, 2018.

in the flow of imports and an increase in inflation.¹¹ In the case of Latin America, especially shipping rates for raw material exports to Asia saw a significant increase. The above situation shows the importance of maritime terminals in international trade and, therefore, of who controls them.

An additional political-economic factor involves the growing population in coastal regions. Historically, these areas have been appealing for human settlement, primarily due to their logistical advantages, serving as pivotal hubs for maritime exchange, transportation, and cultural or tourist activities. Within the Latin American and Caribbean region, there exists a vast expanse of low coastal elevation (within ten meters above sea level), covering 424,000 km², with South America¹² hosting the largest population. Projections indicate that the inhabitants in these areas will increase by 30 million by 2030.¹³

A study dedicated to count the coastal urban population in LAC conducted by the University of Cadiz finds that between 1945 and 2014, the number of people living in cities less than 100 km from the coast increased by an estimated 20 million to 180 million inhabitants, representing 20 percent of the worldwide coastal population.¹⁴ Projections for 2023 indicate that this number increased to over 200 million people, mainly allocated to the region's main ports and touristic cities.

The impact that stems from the changes in swell and rising sea levels will test the reliability of maritime infrastructure in the future. These factors are expected to affect the operability of ports given their navigability conditions. The ports exposed to the open sea, especially in Brazil and the ones that are insufficiently protected by weirs, such as the ports of Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil will be affected the most. Additionally, although to a lesser extent, these factors will also affect southern Peru and northern Chile.¹⁵

All of the above shows the importance of coastal development, and therefore maritime infrastructure, for the economic development of South American countries. The increase in population, added to the effects of climate change, should be a clear concern and objective of public policies for the welfare and progress of the nations. Likewise, the Navy and Coast Guard services should increase their personnel and material resources, as well as the supervision mechanisms for the safety and protection of maritime activity.

Maritime Infrastructure projects in South America

In South America there are currently a number of port infrastructure projects amounting to 12 billion US-dollars, with the largest investments allocated to Brazil, Peru and Chile.

In Argentina, the Chinese state-owned Shaanxi Chemical Industry Group has signed a memorandum of understanding with the provincial governor to build a multipurpose port terminal for ships of up to 20,000 tons in Río Grande. The terminal will enable companies to move petrochemical cargo such as

¹¹ BBC Mundo. "El enorme atasco en el puerto de Shanghái por el confinamiento y sus consecuencias para América Latina y el mundo", abril, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-61182986>.

¹² Including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Falkland Islands/Malvinas, French Guyana, Guyana, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela.

¹³ Brown, S. et al. (2013). Sea-Level Rise Impacts and Responses: A Global Perspective. In: Finkl, C. (eds) Coastal Hazards. Coastal Research Library, vol 1000. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5234-4_5.

¹⁴ Barragán, Juan Manuel; de Andrés, María, "Expansión urbana en las áreas litorales de América Latina y Caribe", Revista de Geografía Norte Grande, núm. 64, septiembre, 2016, pp. 129-149. Revista de Geografía Norte.

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¹⁵ CEPAL, "Efectos del cambio climático en la costa de América Latina y el Caribe; Dinámicas, Tendencias y Variabilidad Climática".

synthetic ammonia, urea and glyphosate. Its construction being priced at 300 million US-dollars.¹⁶ In addition, the Argentine government announced a state investment of 123 million US-dollars in Ushuaia to strengthen the logistic infrastructure that provides services to Antarctic vessels. Furthermore, work began on a 19 million US-dollar-project for the future Intermodal Logistics Node and Dry Port in Salta.¹⁷

In Brazil, investments of 3,5 billion US-dollars have been announced for the ports of Espírito Santo, São Sebastião in Sao Paulo, Itajaí, Santos and Bahia.¹⁸

In Chile, the focal point of interest is the San Antonio Outer Port project. This complex will handle the highest cargo volume in the country and is currently undergoing environmental processing. With an investment of over 3 billion US-dollars, it aims to increase the capacity of the existing port to handle larger ships, boost international trade and act as a distribution center for the country.¹⁹ In the case of Valparaíso, following an investment of over 15 million US-dollars in Terminal 2 of the port, a bidding process is anticipated to upgrade its primary berthing sites until 2029.²⁰ On November 13, 2023, the Valparaíso Port Company presented a project to the regional authorities to expand the docking fronts for an estimated construction cost of 600 million US-dollars. This initiative will allow the movement of 2.3 million TEUs and more than 3 million tons of breakbulk cargo per year. An additional dock will be added in the future to handle cruise ships and other types of cargo.²¹

In Colombia, the mega-project Puerto Antioquia in the Gulf of Urabá began with an investment of more than 600 million US-dollars, which includes dredging, a connection to Medellín and construction of docks to enable the handling of larger vessels.²²

In Ecuador, the deep-water port of Posorja, operated by DP World, is in its final construction phase, with an estimated investment of 1.2 billion US-dollars. At the Bolivar port, there are ongoing activities involving dredging and the installation of new RTG cranes. This, coupled with the construction project for a new pier designed for Post Panamax vessels, is expected to necessitate an estimated investment of 180 million US-dollars. In Guayaquil, the operating company Terminal Portuario de Guayaquil (TPG) will renew equipment for 21 million US-dollars.²³

In Peru, the Chinese state-owned company Cosco Shipping Ports entered the Puerto Chancay project in 2019 by acquiring 60 percent of the shares. The project, which is estimated to cost around 3 billion US-dollars, consists of the construction of a port and logistics complex with two specialized terminals of 280 hectares. The port will have four berths dedicated to bulk, general cargo, and vehicle terminals. It will also contain a container terminal with 11 specialized docks for ship handling. Currently, the port of Chancay is in the midst of construction of its first stage and is expected to be inaugurated in November 2024 during the APEC summit hosted by Peru. The remaining sites will be equipped with a capacity of moving one million TEUs and 6 million tons of bulk cargo. In the ports of Paita and Salaverry, work has begun with investments ranging between 7 and 10 million US-dollars, both for the expansion of berthing sites and the modernization of infrastructure.²⁴ Another project consists of the expansion of the Callao South Terminal by DP World – a holding company of the United Arab Emirates – for 350 million

¹⁶ Infobae. “El régimen chino aumenta la presión para construir una base naval estratégica en Tierra del Fuego”, <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2022/11/03/el-regimen-chino-aumenta-la-presion-para-construir-una-base-naval-estrategica-en-tierra-del-fuego>, noviembre, 2022.

¹⁷ Portal Portuario. <https://portalportuario.cl/edicion-especial-aapa-inversion-portuaria-en-latinoamerica-un-salto-a-la-competitividad-futura-de-la-industria>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Puerto San Antonio. “Cronología del proyecto”. <https://www.puertosanantonio.com/cronologia-del-proyecto>.

²⁰ Portal Portuario. <https://portalportuario.cl/edicion-especial-aapa-inversion-portuaria-en-latinoamerica-un-salto-a-la-competitividad-futura-de-la-industria>.

²¹ Puerto Valparaíso. <https://www.puertovalparaiso.cl/puerto-valparaiso-presento-proyecto-de-ampliacion-portuaria-ante-consejo>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Athenalab, “Puerto de Chancay en Perú y su impacto geopolítico en Chile”.

US-dollars with the aim of extending the port to receive up to three Neopanamax ships and handle almost 2 million TEUs per year.²⁵

In Uruguay, the Belgian consortium Katoen Natie began expansion works at the Cuenca del Plata Terminal of the Port of Montevideo at the end of 2021 with an investment of 460 million US-dollars. Additionally, and as a cooperation project with Brazil, the Hidrovía Lagoa Mirim concession project, known as the Brazil-Uruguay waterway, is currently in the study phase.²⁶

Increasing the security of critical maritime infrastructure

As the numbers in the previous chapters show, maritime infrastructure and its security is vital for the progress of the countries of the Southern Cone. This is backed by the development of South American countries; the growth of coastal cities and the investment projects being implemented. Only recently, Chile's National Congress has approved a constitutional reform to allow the protection of critical infrastructure by the Armed Forces in case of grave or imminent danger. The law defines critical infrastructure as "the set of installations, physical systems or essential services of public utility, as well as those whose affectation would cause serious damage to the health or supply of the population, to the essential economic activity, to the environment or to the security of the country".²⁷ This includes transportation, storage of basic supplies for the population (energy, gas and water) and road, air, land, sea, port or rail connections.

However, intentions to increase the security of maritime infrastructure are not entirely new. In 2002, in Los Cabos, Mexico, leaders of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum established the Secure Trade in the APEC Region (STAR) initiative as a matter of urgency given the severe threat posed by terrorism. Discussions focused on policies and procedures to increase security in the region's sea- and airports, including container shipping security and coastal patrol.²⁸ Having held 11 STAR conferences in the last twenty years, Chile and Peru are still the only South American members of this economic forum.

The implementation of the ISPS Code (International Ship and Port Facility Security Code) in 2004 increased the security of maritime operations, since States were required to certify the conditions and security plans of port facilities. In Chile, where 90 percent of foreign trade takes place via sea routes, the navy is responsible for checking compliance with these requirements and for the general protection of critical maritime infrastructure.²⁹ By 2005, one year after the realization of the ISPS code, more than 92 percent of the ports of the main South American economies (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador) had implemented the code.³⁰

It is therefore evident that, since the implementation of the ISPS code, there has been an increase in measures and the awareness of the States to enhance the security of critical maritime infrastructure.

²⁵ Portal Portuario. <https://portalportuario.cl/edicion-especial-aapa-inversion-portuaria-en-latinoamerica-un-salto-a-la-competitividad-futura-de-la-industria>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ <https://www.senado.cl/a-sala-reforma-que-permite-a-ff-aa-resguardar-infraestructura-critica>, 10 de enero, 2023.

²⁸ APEC, Secure Trade in the APEC Region, <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/counter-terrorism/secure-trade-in-the-apec-region>, octubre, 2021.

²⁹ Muñoz, J. <https://revistamarina.cl/es/articulo/el-rol-de-las-fuerzas-armadas-para-la-proteccion-de-la-infraestructura-critica>, febrero, 2020.

³⁰ Tarántola, Víctor. "La relación de las ciudades puertos y las normas de seguridad portuaria", http://retedigital.com/wp-content/themes/rete/pdfs/portus/Portus_11/La_relaci%C3%B3n_de_las_ciudades_puertos.pdf.

As stated in the book "Latin America and its projection in Asia-Pacific", "International trade between the Southern Cone and Asia-Pacific has strengthened in recent decades, giving way to trade interdependence between the regions".³¹ South American countries play a role in the global value chain by mainly supplying raw materials, which are then utilized in the manufacturing of goods in Asia-Pacific countries. This cargo obviously moves by sea, and China, dependent on these resources, intends to establish a commercial and political strategy through the "Belt and Road" initiative. This is perhaps the reason for the interest of countries with medium and small economies to form an alliance through the "Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership" (CPTPP), avoiding a strategic dependence on China. Dr. Carlos Solar, researcher at RUSI, points out that: "China's economic foothold in Latin America is obliging countries facing the Pacific Ocean to see the Indo-Pacific as a natural extension of their sea interests and maritime sovereignty".³² The signing of the CPTPP by Canada, Chile, Mexico and Peru on the eastern side of the Pacific Ocean, and by Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam on the western side exemplifies this theory. The member states are deepening their trade relationships, eliminating tariffs and allowing access to a greater diversity of goods and services.³³ Global players have understood the potential that the Asia-Pacific represents at a commercial, geopolitical and strategic level.³⁴

In an interview with BBC Mundo, Professor Evan Ellis from the U.S. Army War College highlighted China's interest in investing in maritime infrastructure in South America. He emphasized that Chinese companies aim to control ports to secure dominance over the entire supply chain, thereby avoiding logistical dependence.³⁵ Professor Ellis also explains that this process constitutes a cyclical pattern, in which economic influence gives way to political leverage to gain economic advantages. An example of this is the aforementioned Puerto Chancay project close to Lima, Perú. The majority owner of the project, Cosco Shipping is part of the Ocean Alliance group, which transports 40 percent of global cargo and has terminals in mainland China, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe, South America and the Mediterranean, managing 297 terminals in 37 ports.³⁶ Chancay is not China's first port investment in Latin America, but it is the first one operated by the country. The port will be located 56 km north of Lima, in the province of Huaral. It seeks to be an alternative to decongest Callao, operating cargo coming from the east and the central highlands. Once the project is completed, the province of Huaral would become the gateway to Peru from Asia and vice versa and, at the same time, a trade hub to redistribute cargo to Ecuador, Chile and Colombia. Its connection with the Amazon multimodal axis of the northeastern bioceanic corridor, linking Brazil and Peru, will undoubtedly have a local, national and regional geopolitical impact.

Likewise, on the side of the continent facing the South Atlantic, China's engagement in Rio Grande, Tierra del Fuego, will provide the country with a port that can serve as a logistics hub for the four scientific bases of the country in Antarctica. Additionally, there are media reports that indicate that China has been pushing to establish a base in Ushuaia, Argentina's southernmost port, with the intention

³¹ Bamber, P.; Fernández-Stark, F. "América Latina y su proyección en Asia-Pacífico: Las cadenas globales de valor en el Cono Sur y Asia Pacífico". Centro UC y Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Santiago, diciembre, 2022., p. 145. [Translated by the author]

³² Solar, Carlos. "For Latin American Countries, Geopolitical Competition Begins at Sea", enero, 2023. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/latin-american-countries-geopolitical-competition-begins-sea>.

³³ Spanaus, Diego. El Economista. <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/opinion/CPTPP-y-la-oportunidad-de-llegar-a-mas-mercados-20180314-0166.html>, 15 de marzo de 2018.

³⁴ Sahd, J.; et al. "América Latina y su proyección en Asia-Pacífico". Centro UC y Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Santiago, diciembre, 2022, p. 10.

³⁵ BBC Mundo. "La estratégica red de puertos que China controla en el mundo y cómo está avanzando en América Latina", octubre, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-58849114>.

³⁶ Athenalab, "Puerto de Chancay en Perú y su impacto geopolítico en Chile", p. 9.

of not only getting closer to Antarctica, but also with the desire to establish a strategic position, which can be used to exercise control of the passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.³⁷

In my opinion, reactions to China's investment differ extensively between different actors in South America: At the governmental level (and considering the predominance of leftist governments in the region), China's influence is not necessarily considered a risk. It rather constitutes an opportunity to access external resources and investments in infrastructure that South American countries alone could not afford. The majority of citizens remains somewhat oblivious to the disputes of the great powers. Given the multitude of needs stemming from underdevelopment and inequality rates, the implementation of foreign-financed projects is embraced without questioning their origins. The security and defense agencies however, including the armed forces, meet China's growing dominance in the region, and especially its investment in maritime infrastructure, with concern. This is not surprising considering the shared means and (military) relations between the countries in the region – with the exception of Bolivia and Venezuela – with Western states. The armed forces of the region have developed close ties, particularly with the US and NATO members in the post-Cold War era. An illustration of this is the engagement in various naval exercises such as RIMPAC, UNITAS, and Team Work South, alongside the presence of the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) in the Southern Cone.

The strategic competition between China and the US in the region can also be observed over the offer made by India and China to supply combat aircraft to Argentina. The White House is actively working to prevent this by urging the country to choose an alternative offer from Denmark.³⁸ The ambitions of the Asian defense industry in the region seems to come hand in hand with the investments in critical infrastructure.

Other news that could have an impact on infrastructure and mineral cargo movement, especially in Chile and Peru, are the announcements of US senators who have requested their government to include copper on the list of critical minerals for the US due to a significant supply risk. This is mainly due to its importance for electro mobility, energy transition and the demand generated by the war in Ukraine. This presents an opportunity for producing countries in the world, led by Chile with a production of 6.58 million tons in 2023 and followed by Peru, to increase their production and shipments abroad.³⁹ The vast majority of the copper produced by these countries is exported through the northern ports. The current plans by the US would see an engagement in the research and development of the copper industry, which would create yet another area of competition between the US and China, which is the world's largest importer of copper.

The Chilean case

The Chilean port system is composed of 56 terminals: 10 state-owned terminals for public use, 14 private terminals for public use and 32 private terminals for private use. This large number of ports is self-explanatory due to its geography and the extension of its territory along the Pacific coast,⁴⁰ which makes its exclusive economic zone the tenth largest in the world.

Since the beginning of the concession process in 1999, Chilean ports have been characterized as being among the most efficient and with the lowest costs in Latin America, mainly in relation to the speed with which containers are transferred from the ship to the port, and vice versa, improving yields

³⁷ Saavedra, Guillermo. *Diálogo Américas*, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/china-pressures-argentina-to-build-naval-base/#.ZAZG4C3Q-hA>, enero, 2023.

³⁸ <https://batimes.com.ar/news/argentina/the-us-steps-up-pressure-on-argentina-to-choose-danish-f-16s-over-chinese-or-indian-fighter-jets.phtml>.

³⁹ <https://www.emol.com/noticias/Economia/2023/02/04/1085818/efectos-declare-cobre-critico-eeuu.html>, febrero, 2023.

⁴⁰ Athenalab, "Puerto de Chancay en Perú y su impacto geopolítico en Chile".

and reducing waiting times of ships in ports.⁴¹ Chile is among the top five LAC countries that moved the most containerized cargo (in TEUs) during 2019.⁴² It is also the twelfth most important fishing nation in the world, generating jobs for more than 150,000 people and with exports of more than 6 billion US-dollars in 2018.⁴³

In turn, Chilean transport and trade includes a vast network of ships, ports and cargo that Chilean producers deliver to consumers around the world, and vice versa. More than 147 million tons of products transit through Chilean ports every year. Almost 95 percent of foreign trade is carried out by sea, which represents 37 percent of its GDP⁴⁴. 99 percent of communication is transmitted by submarine cables and 95 percent of the oil, gas and coal consumed by the country comes by sea.⁴⁵

Despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, in 2021, 31 million metric tons of cargo were exported by sea from Chilean ports to China, 9.5 million to the United States and 5.1 million to Japan, the three largest economies in the world. At the same time, ships moved more than 22.7 million tons of cargo internally that year, demonstrating that maritime and port activity did not come to a standstill.⁴⁶ The figures are conclusive in reflecting the relevance of port infrastructure for Chile's maritime development. In addition, the geographic conditions of the country with its well-developed access to the Pacific offer a pole position for developing the Indo-Pacific market. This is particularly relevant with regard to the shift of the geopolitical center of gravity from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁷

Conclusions

Latin America's development is intricately tied to the sea, where maritime infrastructure plays a pivotal role in shaping its present and future. Factors such as economic advancement, population growth in coastal regions, the impacts of climate change, and political-economic alliances, particularly in terms of investment and usufruct, are crucial considerations when evaluating the progress and upcoming projects of South American ports.

There is a significant political-economic relationship concerning maritime infrastructure. This relationship encompasses external elements, such as foreign investment and financing requirements for maritime project development, as well as internal factors, including public policies that facilitate the growth of coastal cities and address the impacts of climate change.

Effective control of ports is crucial for the transportation of goods. While the freedom of ship movement across oceans is generally assured, at least from a legal perspective, the accessibility of terminals depends not only on the quality and durability of their infrastructure but also on decisions made by relevant authorities. These decisions can significantly affect supply chains, particularly in cases of terminal closure or temporary suspension of operations.

At the same time, the upkeep and steady improvement of port infrastructure are vital for the economic development of South American states. At present, there are infrastructure projects under construction in South America for more than 12 billion US-dollars, with Brazil, Peru and Chile consolidating the largest amounts. Investments by Chinese state-owned companies are distributed in Peru and Argentina in accordance with the global reach of the Asian giant to establish a port hub in the South Pacific, as well as to provide services to ships transiting to and from Antarctica through the South Atlantic. It is

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Athenalab, "Puerto de Chancay en Perú y su impacto geopolítico en Chile".

⁴³ Armada de Chile, "Horizonte en el Pacífico, visión oceánica de la Armada de Chile, https://www.armada.cl/custom/radio_naval/libros/libro_horizonte.pdf, abril, 2019.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ DIRECTEMAR, Boletín Estadístico Marítimo, edición 2022, https://www.directemar.cl/directemar/site/docs/20180626/20180626141553/boletin_estadistico_2022_a.pdf.

⁴⁷ Athenalab, "Puerto de Chancay en Perú y su impacto geopolítico en Chile".

noteworthy that a majority of left-leaning governments in the area perceive such investments as non-threatening. In contrast, military actors adopt a more critical perspective, expressing concerns about a potential loss of effective control over these infrastructures.

Maritime infrastructure is a critical element for the economies of the South American countries. Its security and protection, not only through compliance with international agreements and initiatives, such as the APEC STAR in the Pacific Ocean and the ISPS code globally, but also through government public policies, is fundamental for regional prosperity. The development of the critical maritime infrastructure in the region must combine efficiency and sustainability, in order to continue promoting the progress and welfare of its inhabitants.

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The Engagement of South America's Navies in Domestic Roles

Érico Esteves Duarte & Danilo Marcondes

Introduction

The history of South America's armed forces acting in domestic roles is so remarkable that it has shaped the very formation of its states.¹ More than defining borders, they have typically performed civilian functions such as building infrastructure and cities, providing public safety, and assisting the population in emergencies and disasters.^{2,3} Moreover, the involvement of South American armed forces in political life through civil-military coups is infamous, especially in the second half of the 20th century, reverberating even today in the trend of securitization and militarization of public policies and administration.⁴ South American navies, in particular, have also played such roles, although two things should be noted. On the one hand, navies are costly state capabilities that are difficult to provision over time. For that reason, not all countries in the region could constitute navies with the operational capacity and political weight to perform domestic tasks of some relevance.⁵ On the other hand, unlike the United Kingdom and the United States, South American navies are generally younger and weaker institutions than their land-based counterparts. Hence, they are more susceptible to their agendas.

South America contains four countries that deploy more than token fleets that merit investigation (with the exception of Venezuela, which has very limited access to data for assessment): Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia. Of the four, the Argentine Navy is the most curious case because it is the naval force with the scarcest resources and the most constrained performance in domestic functions among the selected cases. However, in a more extended historical period, since the Second World War, it was the most powerful navy in terms of quantity and quality of means. It was also the one that had the most remarkable political protagonism, one of the reasons that led it to play a prominent role in the "Dirty War" of the last Argentine dictatorship and the outbreak of the Falklands War.^{6,7} The negative consequences of these historical roles of the Argentine Navy explain the strict legal demarcation and civilian control over its performance in domestic roles. Brazil is the only case where the Navy presents an institutional history older than the Army, tracing its origin to the pre-independence period. However, it lost its operational and political primacy to the Army at the end of the 19th century.⁸ Still, the Brazilian Navy is the most capable naval force in the South Atlantic with great operational capacity in non-military functions, mainly in response to natural disasters and emergencies in Brazil and the region.⁹ Chile has the most capable naval force today regarding the quality and readiness of means¹⁰, whose responsibilities for domestic functions are delegated to the General Directorate of Maritime Territory and Merchant Marine, an organization separate from the naval operations command. Despite its vast capabilities, the Navy primarily focuses on supporting natural emergencies and combating illegal fishing and piracy, with a supporting role to the national police (*Carabineros*). Finally, Colombia is the country with the

¹ Centeno 2003, 5, 108-116.

² Pion-Berlin 2016.

³ Schenoni 2021.

⁴ Calderón 2020, 400.

⁵ Barros 2019, 189.

⁶ Duarte and Machado 2021.

⁷ Jenne and Puente Olivera 2019, 245.

⁸ Scheina 2003, Chapt. 13.

⁹ Espach 2019, 132-133.

¹⁰ Rivas 2021, 25.

most significant involvement of armed forces in domestic functions in South America. In fact, until 2016, these functions were almost exclusively its objective. Thus, its navy was more of a police force than a war navy.¹¹

After this brief introduction of the four most relevant South American navies, this chapter delimits its analytical focus to the three most relevant and recurring domestic roles: providing public security, responding to disasters and emergencies, and, derived from this, acting against the pandemic of COVID-19. Among the three functions, and except for Argentina, the performance of South American navies in the fight against drug trafficking and criminal organizations stands out since this has been one of the foremost maritime threats in the region since the end of the Cold War.¹²

Public Safety

The South American armed forces have played police roles at various moments in their countries' history, especially during the periods of civil wars and border definition in the 19th century and during the military regimes that dominated the continent in the second half of the 20th century. Navies have played the role of coast guards since the colonial period, but have lost this capacity with the high cost of the transition to steamships and battleships, especially with the technological revolution of naval means since the 1970s. In most cases, the lack of means is more of a reason for the restricted use of navies in public security than any legal norm or prohibition. In this sense, Argentina and Colombia are opposite cases. On the one hand, there is an Argentine law from 1986, reaffirmed several times over the years since then, which prohibits the employment of its Navy in domestic functions. On the other hand, until recently, the Colombian Navy primarily served domestically. Despite its creation in 1994, the Colombian Coast Guard only gained operational status to police drug trafficking marine routes in 2000, when it relieved the Colombian Navy of its role on the "War on Drugs". Brazil and Chile have intermediate conditions of action compared to the previous ones. They are countries with relatively powerful navies, but they have specific units for police action in coastal areas and, in Brazil's case, also in rivers, especially in the Amazon region and the flooded areas of the Pantanal.

Argentine law prohibits the armed forces from developing doctrine, planning, training, acquiring equipment, or intelligence and employment hypotheses or scenarios in the domestic security sphere. That follows, in consequence, the country's trauma of the involvement of its navy in the military regime (1976-1983), with developments in state terrorism and the Falklands War. Therefore, since the 1980s democratic transition, there has been effective political steering of subsidiary defense missions, high professionalization, and adequate operational performance within the established legal boundaries.¹³ In 1984, the Naval Prefecture was created with the prerogative of all domestic and police action, while the Navy is limited to strict action against external state threats, in addition to the subsidiary and occasional missions of logistical support to disasters and emergencies in UN peace operations and the support of friendly countries.¹⁴

The legal basis for this division of tasks is the First National Defense Law (n° 23.554/1988), the Law of Internal Security (n° 24.059/1991), and the Law on Intelligence (n° 25.520/2011). Even with the advent of new threats promoted by the United States as priorities for the South American forces in the 1990s, the decree regulating the national defense law (n° 727/2006) unequivocally prohibits the employment of Argentine armed forces against non-state external threats.^{15,16} Even the attempt to relax

¹¹ Santos-Filho and Arciniegas Carreño, 2021, 89-90.

¹² Duarte, Marcondes, and Carneiro 2019, 12.

¹³ Anzelini 2022, 43, 50.

¹⁴ Soprano 2017, 456, 465.

¹⁵ Jenne and Puente Olivera 2019, 247, 251-252.

¹⁶ Anzelini 2022, 47.

the domestic employment regulations of the armed forces in the Mauricio Macri administration (2015-2019) was not able to change such domestic employment restrictions.¹⁷ Moreover, the Argentine public security law only allows the possibility of support by the armed forces to the public security system as a result of direct external aggression, logistical support, and actions to restore public security in situations of extreme gravity with a previously declared state of emergency.¹⁸

Therefore, the main force to be deployed in Argentine jurisdictional waters with power to conduct policing and boarding operations on shipping lines and ports, is the Naval Prefecture under the Ministry of Internal Security. The Navy must act beyond this limit and in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Still, there is a grey area in articulating the performance between the two forces.¹⁹ Firstly, because it is only since 2004 that the Naval Prefecture has received the resources and an organizational expansion. It has a slightly smaller staff than the Navy (13,250 versus 18,500), eleven departments of operation that encompass the entire country, and direct representation liaisons in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Congress (while the Navy has none, but civilians representing the Ministry of Defense in equivalent capacities). Therefore, it is a newer and politically stronger institution than the Navy.²⁰ Secondly, while there is a straightforward assignment to the Naval Prefecture in combating illegal fishing even in the EEZ, in cases of other maritime crimes perpetrated by international criminal organizations, there is not as much clarity. The legal, organizational, and bureaucratic bases for interoperability between the Naval Prefecture and the Navy must be improved. The delineation between jurisdictional waters and the EEZ is impractical, and there needs to be a functional allocation between controlling, interception, and policing.²¹ Finally, there are extemporaneous issues that further complicate the interface. For example, while the responsibility for ensuring a presence in Argentines territorial claims in Antarctica should lie with the Naval Prefecture, neither the Prefecture, nor the Navy can sustain patrols in that region.²² Consequently, there is no coordination of patrols nor efficient planning of the limited resources.^{23,24}

Brazil is the second largest cocaine consumer globally and one of the largest hubs for trafficking to Europe and Africa. Evidence of this is that of the 40,198 tons of drugs seized in maritime areas, 50 percent was cocaine found in containers in the ports of Santos (6,294 tons or 15.5 percent), Rio de Janeiro (5,000 tons or 12.5 percent), as well as Paranaguá and ports in the state of Santa Catarina.²⁵ Additionally, the Federal Police has reported the seizure of 93,000 tons of cocaine, and the Federal Highway Police another 40,000 tons^{26,27}, largely on the main trafficking route from the borders of Bolivia and Paraguay through the Paraguay River basin. However, there is a second main route from Colombia and Peru through the Amazon River towards Manaus and ports in the Northeast region that are more difficult for law enforcement agencies to access.²⁸ These data highlight the difficult task of overseeing Brazil's rivers to combat narco-trafficking.

Inter-agency cooperation has been an essential component of the domestic responsibilities carried out by the Brazilian Navy. For example, in the Amazonas state, the Brazilian Navy has patrolled the rivers and cooperated with the State's Environmental Police to seize illegal fishing stocks and verify the documentation of ships and its crews.²⁹ In all states of the Amazon region, the Navy acts to enhance the

¹⁷ Anzelini 2022, 51-52.

¹⁸ Canto Eissa 2016, 184.

¹⁹ Canto and Eissa 2016, 186, 194-195.

²⁰ Jenne and Puente Olivera 2019, 254.

²¹ Canto and Eissa 2016, 197, 200-201.

²² Sanchez 2017, 181-182, 186.

²³ Jenne and Puente Olivera 2019, 157-260, 269.

²⁴ Soprano 2017, 466-468.

²⁵ Chavarría et al. 2021, 37-38.

²⁶ (Agência Brasil 2022).

²⁷ Polícia Federal 2022)

²⁸ Chavarría et al. 2021, 47.

²⁹ Noticiário Marítimo 2014, 276.

safety of navigation in the different rivers.³⁰ Alongside the Internal Revenue Service (*Receita Federal*) and the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA, in its Portuguese acronym), the Navy combats animal trafficking and tax evasion.³¹ The Brazilian Navy, particularly its Marine Corps, has been deployed in public security missions supporting police forces. For example, in 2014, armored vehicles and personnel from the Marine Corps provided support for the implementation of police pacifying units in the Rio de Janeiro area of Complexo da Maré as part of security preparations to host sporting events such as the 2014 FIFA World Cup matches and the 2016 Olympic Games.³²

On occasions, when the state government authorizes federal interventions to uphold public order in Brazilian states, Marine Corps with previous experience in the United Nations Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) will be deployed in Rio de Janeiro's urban areas. For example, in 2018, President Michel Temer authorized such an intervention in Rio de Janeiro. In total, the Brazilian Marine Corps was deployed in 57 operations between February and December 2018, which included the apprehension of drugs, stolen cars, and ammunition and the arrest of drug dealers.³³ In another case in the same year, the Brazilian marines deployed to clear blocked national roads, patrolled and safeguarded the Santos port facilities, and provided protection to truck drivers willing to operate, particularly to address the fuel shortage caused by the strike.^{34, 35}

Colombia's historical political fragmentation reinforces its characteristics of strong and competitive political leaders, who resort to securitization and militarization of their public policies.^{36,37} Nonetheless, it lacked the resolve and resources to effectively employ its military forces in counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics operations. That was only feasible because of pressure from the United States, on which they are severely dependent for budget, platforms, doctrines, and training.^{38,39}

With the weakening of paramilitary groups in 2011, greater emphasis was placed on combating drug trafficking than counterinsurgency, emulating NATO's multidimensional Comprehensive Action approach of the 1990s for post-conflict areas. In the case of the Navy, the focus on counter-narcotrafficking was expanded to the Caribbean region in cooperation with the United States and supplemented by conducting socioeconomic development projects.⁴⁰ Moreover, with the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC and until the beginning of the Petro administration, the fight against drug trafficking became localized, relieving a significant portion of the Colombian Navy to be reoriented to other subsidiary actions, such as natural disaster response and post-conflict management, and, for the first time in decades, to conventional interstate conflicts.^{41,42}

In practical terms, the Colombian delay in formulating a specific policy for maritime interdiction was due to the lack of adequate means and the inability of the Navy to take on police functions. Despite the creation of the Coast Guard in 1994, it took almost twenty years for the Colombian Navy to have vessels in quantity and quality to confront the fast boats and submersibles of the narco-trafficking cartels.^{43,44} It also required creating a central intelligence unit for the armed forces and training personnel to plan and evaluate maritime operations.⁴⁵ Between 1994 and 2014, the Coast Guard fleet operating out

³⁰ Noticiário Marítimo 2014b, 276.

³¹ Noticiário Marítimo 2014a, 274.

³² Noticiário Marítimo 2014d, 272.

³³ Castro, 2019.

³⁴ Friede, 2018.

³⁵ Noticiário Marítimo 2018.

³⁶ Diamint 2015, 56, 61.

³⁷ Buitrago 2018.

³⁸ Guerrero 2019, 62-63, 65.

³⁹ Santos-Filho and Arciniegas Carreño 2021, 84-85.

⁴⁰ Santos-Filho and Arciniegas Carreño 2021, 84-85, 88.

⁴¹ Ellis 2023, 13-15.

⁴² Santos-Filho and Arciniegas Carreño 2021, 89-90.

⁴³ Reina and Fajardo-Toro 2019, 459, 468.

⁴⁴ Guerrero 2017, 159.

⁴⁵ Guerrero 2019, 67-69.

of Cartagena essentially consisted of 10 Dolphin speedboats donated by the United States, plus a few other support vessels purchased second-hand. After that, the Coast Guard acquired 24 locally produced Eduradono 380s and another ten Renegades from the US.⁴⁶

Maritime drug trafficking from Colombia is mostly conducted by speedboats from the north and northeast toward the Caribbean, then shipped in containers to the United States and Europe. In 2021 alone, the Navy seized 34,782 tons of cocaine on that route. A second mode of trafficking is directly in containers to Europe from the ports of Cartagena, Barranquilla, and Santa Maria, which totaled 19,306 tons of cocaine, according to the latest report by the International Center for Research and Analysis against Maritime Narcotrafficking. A third innovative, but not yet very significant method is using submersibles and semi-submersibles to transport drugs to Mexico via the Pacific. Although they represent only five percent of total drug seizures, the seizure of such vessels has doubled since 2019. Finally, the Colombian Navy has taken ostensible action against illegal deposits in coastal and riverine areas, resulting in the highest amount of drug seizures, reaching 42,243 tons of cocaine in 2021.⁴⁷

Chile limits its armed forces on public security action closer to Argentina than Brazil and Colombia. Despite the expansion of the concept of security in its defense documents since 2010⁴⁸, the tragic past of the military dictatorship led Chile to a strict regulation of the armed forces. They mainly play a supporting role for national and maritime law enforcement agencies in combating piracy, drug and human trafficking, and illegal immigration in border areas only since 2019.^{49,50,51} Chile's main drug issues are related to the import of synthetic drugs from Asia, rather than the production and export of cocaine, therefore it has a profile distinct from other South American countries. As it is an extensively consuming market, maritime trafficking to Chile has increased substantially since 2019.^{52,53} The General Directorate of Maritime Territory and Merchant Marine of the Navy is the agency responsible for all aspects of maritime security in Chile with dedicated structure and personnel. It operates 55 patrol and coastal boats that, in practice, are used far more frequently to counter illegal fishing than other types of organized crime.^{54,55,56,57}

Natural Disaster Response and the COVID-19 Pandemic

As pointed out earlier, the Argentine government strictly regulates the domestic deployment of the armed forces. Their deployment in emergency responses in Argentina and allied countries was only granted in 2014. This permission came with the condition that they exclusively fulfill a logistical support role, subordinated to a civilian political authority according to a specific presidential decree. More recently, the Macri administration created an interagency operational command to support natural disaster relief, whose performance was impressive in the Argentine response to the COVID-19 pandemic.^{58,59} The Joint Chiefs of Staff issued the protocol for transmission control on military installations on February 12, 2020, much earlier than the first case in Argentina was announced on

⁴⁶ Guerrero 2019, 76-78.

⁴⁷ Chavarría et al. 2022, 5, 17, 21, 79; 2021, 12, 14, 21, 31-32.

⁴⁸ Vallejos 2011, 7.

⁴⁹ Jenne and Martínez 2022, 65, 68.

⁵⁰ IISS 2023, 387.

⁵¹ BBC Monitoring Americas 2019.

⁵² Ossandón 2022.

⁵³ PortalPortuario 2020.

⁵⁴ Chile 2017, 281, 285.

⁵⁵ IISS 2013, 389.

⁵⁶ Rivas 2021, 26.

⁵⁷ Chile 2020, 44.

⁵⁸ Caderón 2020, 400.

⁵⁹ Anzelini 2022, 50-52.

March 3, when President Alberto Fernández published Decree 260/2020 affirming the health emergency and Administrative Decision 286/2020 regulating the deployment of armed forces in support roles. On March 12, the Ministry of Health published the "Plano Operativo de Preparación y Respuesta al COVID-19". The Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed it on the following day, specifying the operational commander and providing instructions for coordinating the three forces in civil protection and humanitarian aid operations. On March 17, the Minister of Defense issued Resolution 88/2020, establishing the Emergency Defense Committee and the creation of 14 joint emergency zone commands (three in Buenos Aires province and eleven others around the country). On March 19, President Fernández approved the decree imposing social isolation and establishing the armed forces' support mission as Operation General Belgrano. The interagency coordination organized food distribution, delivered sanitary supplies, supported vulnerable infrastructure, and engaged in other logistical tasks performed around the emergency zone commands. The Argentine Navy conducted 23 days of navigation with 123 units and 3,289 sailors to distribute food and rations.⁶⁰

Brazilian armed forces have performed a traditional and essential role in disaster relief almost annually during rainfall seasons as evidence of climate change and in environmental disasters. The Brazilian Navy's Basic Doctrine indicates the following activities to be carried out by the Navy: "a) support for foreign policy; b) humanitarian operations; c) social and civic actions; d) rescue operations [...]; h) cooperation with civil defense activities".⁶¹ In June 2010, the Brazilian Navy created the first Operational Medicine Unit in the Brazilian Armed Forces dedicated to disaster relief, training, doctrinal development, and technical support⁶². The unit was first used in January 2011 when heavy rain triggered flooding and landslides in the highland region of Rio de Janeiro state⁶³. Its most recent and impressive operation was its deployment with the Brazilian Navy flagship *Atlantico* (formerly HMS Ocean) in 2023 to relieve coastal populations hit by the most significant storms on record in Brazil and the resulting landslides.⁶⁴

Additionally, the Brazilian Navy carried out operations to fight forest fires, especially in the wetlands of Pantanal.⁶⁵ Conversely, the Brazilian Navy faced a more significant environmental disaster in September 2019, when an oil spill affected the northeastern Brazilian coast, in what the Commander of the Navy claimed at the time was like a "bombing of the Brazilian State".⁶⁶

Although not directly related to natural disasters, the Brazilian Navy plays a vital role in providing health and dental care to remote populations living on the banks of the principal rivers in the Amazon region. The importance of these initiatives should not be underestimated. For example, an operation conducted in Acre involved 58,613 medical and dental procedures on 14,531 individuals over three months.⁶⁷ In those areas, one of the main safety concerns is the scalping caused by incidents with motorboats. To address this issue, the Navy conducts public awareness campaigns regarding navigation safety in cooperation with the Ministry of Family and Human Rights and the Brazilian Red Cross.

The Brazilian Navy's experience with domestic humanitarian support proved helpful in a series of various humanitarian assistance engagements overseas. In 2010, the Brazilian Navy vessels transported food supplies and personnel after the January 2010 earthquake that affected Haiti. The Brazilian Navy also provided a mobile hospital after an earthquake affected Chile in the same year. In 2013, it assisted Argentina after thunderstorms hit Buenos Aires and La Plata region. In 2015, after a volcano erupted in the Cape Verdean Island of Fogo, the Brazilian Navy sent a warship that was already in transit to

⁶⁰ Anzelini 2022, 54.

⁶¹ Brazil, 2014.

⁶² Oliveira 2019, 15.

⁶³ Vilela 2015, 76.

⁶⁴ Agência Marinha de Notícias 2023.

⁶⁵ Marinha do Brasil 2020a, 2020b.

⁶⁶ Monteiro 2019.

⁶⁷ (Noticiário Marítimo 2014c, 313).

participate in the Maritime Task Force of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to provide medicine, food, and barracks to shelter the population that had to flee their homes.⁶⁸

The Brazilian Navy rapidly mobilized to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly employing its Nuclear, Biological, Chemical, and Radiological Response teams to disinfect public facilities (including schools, bank agencies, military units, airports, and ports) against COVID-19.⁶⁹ In addition, as early as April 2020, the Brazilian Marine Corps organized an online technical qualification course against the spread of COVID-19, which included personnel from Argentina (25), Bolivia (10), Colombia (5), Guatemala (4), India (1), Namibia (8), Paraguay (17), Peru (21), Portugal (5), Sweden (1), Thailand (1), USA (1) and Uruguay (1).⁷⁰

Given their history of counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics operations, the Colombian armed forces' actions in natural and humanitarian emergencies have only been conducted recently, focusing on supporting the population in isolated areas of the country and projecting influence towards the Caribbean. The action on the islands of Providencia and San Andres and Haiti in 2017 after the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew was a milestone in restructuring the Colombian Navy in this function.⁷¹ In addition to operational limitations, Colombia was experiencing a delicate political situation of executing social policies concerning the peace agreements with the FARC's when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Evidence that the government response was slow (effective only in June 2020) and the employment of the armed forces geographically limited, was the low effectiveness of social isolation and the high number of infected and dead. This also led to actions of paramilitary groups coercing the population that escalated into violence in the country.^{72,73}

Chile emphasizes employing the military in non-traditional domestic roles such as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance as a country with a challenging geography subject to earthquakes and tsunamis. However, the Navy plays a marginal role compared to the other services, the most prominent being the operation of the National Tsunami Alarm System.^{74,75} Chile, meanwhile, experienced an unusual situation at the beginning of the pandemic in the face of popular demonstrations in the streets with severe clashes with police and armed forces since the end of 2019, which made it difficult to declare a state of emergency in March and impose social isolation.⁷⁶ Perhaps as a consequence, its response was more militarized than expected, with the employment of the armed forces and a staff of general officers, including two admirals, to support the *Carabineros* in imposing curfews, controlling airports, and supporting hospital supplies. The latter was the Chilean Navy's main contribution.⁷⁷

Final Remarks

While the nature of how navies operate traditionally associates them with tasks performed outside of state borders, including in maritime diplomacy⁷⁸, our analysis illustrates that, in the South American context, naval forces have performed various domestic tasks.

While we concentrated our analysis on three of these functions, naval forces play a domestic role in many other activities. For instance, supporting scientific and technological research is worth

⁶⁸ Ministério da Defesa 2015.

⁶⁹ [Noticiário Marítimo 2021, 319.

⁷⁰ Access to Information request 60000.000777/2022-10 submitted to the Brazilian Navy, 02 April 2022, response provided 27 April 2022.

⁷¹ Dryad Global 2020.

⁷² Cárdenas, Downing, and Jonhson 2021, 4-6.

⁷³ Human Rights Watch 2020.

⁷⁴ Chile 2020, 134-141.

⁷⁵ Vilela 2015, 70.

⁷⁶ Calderon 2020, 403.

⁷⁷ Ellis 2020, 53-54, 57, 61.

⁷⁸ Le Mièrre 2014.

highlighting. Argentina and Chile concentrate their research primarily on scientific institutions in Antarctica following their territorial claims in the region⁷⁹, while Brazil aims for a more comprehensive approach to scientific research and promoting access to technology. The Brazilian Admiral Álvaro Alberto created the country's National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) in the early 1950s and was later awarded with the most important science and technology award.⁸⁰ In addition, the Navy created a Science, Technology, and Innovation Day on Admiral Álvaro Alberto's birthday, further reinforcing his pioneering role (he was also a member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences and the founder of Brazil's nuclear program) and the Navy's commitment with scientific research for national development.

The Navy also plays an active role in Brazil's higher education institutions. For example, a technical cooperation agreement signed between the Navy and the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) in the late 1950s has been renewed ever since and has led to the creation of Brazil's first naval engineering course, benefiting 500 officers who have graduated in over six decades.⁸¹ Furthermore, the need to cooperate with research institutions has led to strategic changes. In July 2023, the Navy's Directorate for Nuclear and Technological Development was transferred from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo and allocated within the Navy's technological complex, located within USP's campus and closer to other scientific research institutions.⁸²

In addition, the Navy has managed the Interministerial Commission for Maritime Resources (CIRM, in its Portuguese acronym), created in 1974, and has carried out Brazil's Antarctic Research program since 1984. This increased the Brazilian Navy's engagement with the scientific community, and introducing the Navy as a partner of Brazil's funding agencies in providing resources for scientific research. For example, a new ten-year plan for Antarctic research started in 2023, with a public call providing 30 million Brazilian reais in funding, the largest sum in 40 years of Antarctic research.⁸³ More recently, in 2008, the Brazilian Navy created a Secretariat for Science, Technology, and Innovation. Different units associated with the Brazilian Navy participate in the most important scientific meeting held annually in Brazil (*Sociedade Brasileira para o Progresso da Ciência-SBPC*).⁸⁴

Overall, the domestic use of the Armed Forces brings some challenges to civil-military relations in South American countries, particularly in countries with a history of military overthrow of civilian governments. First, it tends to weaken civilian control of the armed forces, creating the idea that the military can always solve various domestic problems. Second, in the specific case of the navies, their domestic responsibilities tend to overstretch their capacities, reducing their utilities to provide autonomous ocean stewardship in the context of more profound international great power rivalries.⁸⁵

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⁷⁹ Medeiros and de Mattos 2019.

⁸⁰ Noticiário Marítimo 2023a.

⁸¹ Noticiário Marítimo 2022.

⁸² Zanini 2023.

⁸³ Noticiário Marítimo 2023b.

⁸⁴ Noticiário Marítimo 2017.

⁸⁵ Duarte 2022, 326-329.

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Armed Robbery, Piracy, and Smuggling in South America's Seas

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Introduction.

The geographical and maritime diversity of South America and the Caribbean is remarkable. Six different regions could be considered to describe the South American maritime domain. The first is the Caribbean region and the North Coast of South America, which is influenced by the Caribbean Sea, where coasts tend to be low and sandy, with abundant islands, coral reefs, and mangroves, especially in the Caribbean. The second is the northern region of the continent and northern Brazil, which has conditions similar to the Caribbean region. This area is influenced by the estuary of the Amazon River and is characterized by marshy coasts and dense forests. A third region comprises what is known as Brazil's southeastern and southern coastline, characterized by alternating low coasts and cliffs and part of the beaches that have made Brazil famous as a tourist destination. A fourth subregion comprising Atlantic and South Pacific Ocean waters includes Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay and is characterized by higher, rockier coastlines, strong ocean currents, and a colder, windier climate. The fifth region corresponds to the Andean region of the Pacific Ocean and involves Peru, Ecuador, and part of Chile. In this area, the coasts are generally high and rocky, with significant influence of cold currents, such as the Humboldt Current. Finally, the sixth sub-region covers northern Ecuador and the Colombian Pacific coast. This region has dense mangroves, a high density of coastal forests, and very particular meteorological conditions.^{1,2} (Isla and Schnack 2009) (Domergue 2020)

These sub-regions do not share coastal configuration characteristics but share similar challenges to crime at sea. Armed robbery, smuggling of different goods, such as drugs and arms by sea, and IUU Fishing are the primary challenges faced by the countries in the region. The jurisdictional waters of each country are massive, and the lack of adequate resources makes it challenging to obtain accurate information and surveillance of all vessels, people, and cargo transiting through them.

This chapter will discuss three of the leading maritime security challenges South American countries face (armed robbery, piracy, and smuggling) and the countermeasures implemented to combat them. It will answer questions such as: which countries are facing the challenges of armed robbery (piracy) and smuggling? What are the main challenges regarding international smuggling? How do South American countries fight those threats nationally and internationally?

For all the above, this chapter is organized as follows: the first part describes how armed robbery and piracy affect South American countries, providing quantitative and spatial information on their behavior. In a second section, similar information is presented, focusing on smuggling drugs, arms, and goods. A third section presents some information on the mechanisms and operations developed in the region to counteract these threats, and a final section presents some conclusions and final remarks.

This information is helpful as it becomes increasingly clear that transnational organized crime networks, taking advantage of maritime interconnectedness and spaces to capture illegal revenues, are developing what can be termed *deviant globalization*. In addition to affecting maritime security, it causes significant damage to the social fabric, economies, and societies of the countries involved. It also undermines trust in state institutions that enforce the law and affects relations between the countries that compose the international system and the region.

¹ Isla and Schnack 2009.

² Domergue 2020.

Armed Robbery and Piracy in the South American Region

Piracy and armed robbery are two significant challenges to maritime security in the region. Although they are similar phenomena, they exhibit distinct characteristics since they manifest themselves in varying ways in the different sub-regions of the continent. On the one hand, armed robbery mainly impacts international traffic in some regional ports. It also affects shipping in some regions of the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, where organized criminal gangs attack small tourist, coastal, and fishing vessels in the territorial waters of Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Suriname, and Ecuador, among others. Piracy events refer mainly to the latter phenomenon of armed robbery in waters beyond the national territorial sea. Therefore, their description is comprehensively included as a single phenomenon.

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC-IMB) data on incidents of piracy or armed robbery in South American waters over the last ten years, presented in Table 1 and Figure 1, show that Peru (69), Venezuela (39), Colombia (35), Brazil (23), Ecuador (21) and Guyana (10) are the countries with the highest number of incidents of this type. The ports of El Callao (Peru), Puerto José and Puerto La Cruz (Venezuela), Cartagena (Colombia), Macapa (Brazil), Guayaquil (Ecuador), and Georgetown (Guyana) have recorded more than ten incidents in the last ten years (ICC-IMB 2022, ICC-IMB 2021, ICC-IMB 2020, ICC-IMB 2019, ICC-IMB 2018, ICC-IMB 2017, ICC-IMB 2016, ICC-IMB 2015, ICC-IMB 2014, ICC-IMB 2013).³ There are three aspects to be highlighted from this information. The first is that most of these incidents involve theft of minor items from vessels in port or at anchor. However, the use of weapons, threats to crew members, and the levels of violence are evidence of the dangerousness of these types of attacks. Second, among the incidents reported by the ICC, it is worth mentioning some boarding attempts by groups of armed persons (between 5 and 10) on board speedboats, even firing shots in an attempt to stop the vessels. These incidents have occurred mainly in Ecuador and Venezuela, generating ICC alerts to the navigators to take the corresponding measures when navigating those waters. It should be noted that this modus operandi, more closely related to the actions of pirates in other regions of the world, has only been present in the region for the past five years. Third, today, the most sensitive areas for incidents of this type are located in El Callao, Macapa, and Guayaquil ports. On the other hand, incidents of lower intensity are recurring in ports such as Cartagena, Georgetown, and Puerto José.

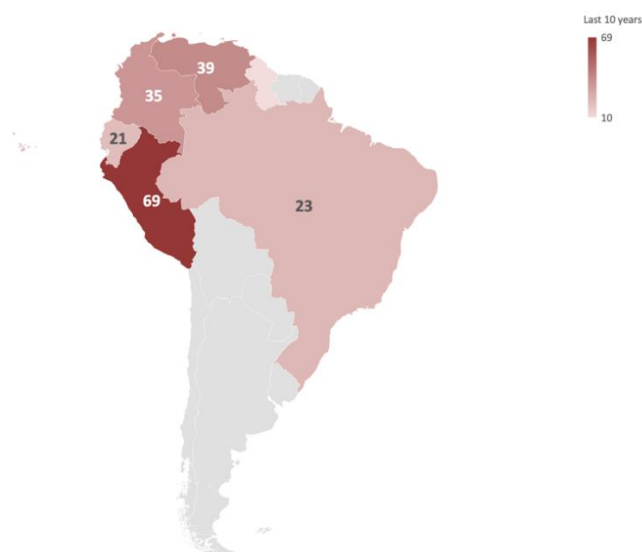


Figure 1: Number of incidents 2013-2022. Data from ICC Annual Reports in Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships

³ See ICC-IMB 2013 to ICC-IMB 2022.

TABLE 1. Number of Incidents 2013-2022

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	10 Years
Peru	4	0	0	11	2	4	10	8	18	12	69
Venezuela	0	1	1	5	12	11	6	0	0	3	39
Colombia	7	2	5	4	6	1	3	1	6	0	35
Brazil	1	1	0	0	0	4	2	7	3	5	23
Ecuador	3	0	0	0	2	4	3	5	4	0	21
Guyana	2	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	2	10
Trinidad y Tobago	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suriname	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Argentina	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Data from ICC Annual Reports in Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships per year⁴

The other form of piracy and armed robbery in the region is characterized by theft from fishing, commercial, or tourist boats. There is less information on this phenomenon, as few institutions in the region monitor yacht or fisheries trafficking in the same structured way as the ICC does for international trade. The closest are the statistics collected by the Caribbean Safety and Security Network⁵ and the noonsite.com organization⁶, which collects information from navigators on regional security incidents. From 2015 until 2022 the organizations have reported 794 events in the Caribbean waters of attempted theft, theft, attempted burglary, burglary, robbery, attempted piracy or piracy, assault, vandalism, and even assault resulting in death (05 cases) (CSSN 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). In the rest of the South American continent, these events are sporadic, occurring mainly in the Atlantic near the coasts of Guyana (03), Suriname (05), and Brazil (09)⁷.

TABLE 2. Number of Incidents 2015-2022.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Reported Events	83	92	94	114	140	71	103	114

Source: Data from CSSN (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) and Noonsite databases.

This phenomenon affects many South American countries in different ways. In Argentina, the coastal docks of the El Tigre area, which is mainly riverine, the focus lies on the theft of engines and spare parts due to the high cost of these on the local market.⁸ In Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname, among others, fishermen are stripped of their catch, belongings, fishing gear, and even parts of the vessel such as engines and communication equipment. Regions such as the Gulf of Maracaibo, the Colombian and Ecuadorian Pacific, the Gulf of Paria, the region of

⁴ ICC International Maritime Bureau data from the Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships Reports for 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

⁵ CSNN 2023.

⁶ noonsite 2023.

⁷ noonsite.com information has been extracted from the security profiles of South and Central America and the Caribbean countries. Available at <https://www.noonsite.com/Countries/>.

⁸ Gallota 2022.

Puertecito in San Antonio (Chile),⁹ the region of Tumbes between Peru and Ecuador, and the region between Guyana and Suriname are the ones registering the highest number of incidents. A shocking example of piracy in the region occurred in April 2018, when masked men attacked four Guyanese fishing boats 48 kilometers off the coast, seriously injuring the crews and stealing the boats. Of the 20 victims, only five survived.^{10,11}

The region has high indicators of maritime insecurity. The events that have occurred in the last decade show that the authorities' efforts to exercise control over their jurisdictional waters have not been practical, and the presence of organized crime groups affects safe navigation in practically all the waters of South American countries. Furthermore, in several South American countries, the prosecution of crime is hampered by a number of factors, including corruption, weak judicial systems¹² (Lara-Martínez 2020), and lack of economic opportunity. Crime and violence thrive because of the weak rule of law, limited economic opportunities, and poor education, undermining public faith in democracy and hindering economic growth. The capacity of the justice apparatus to prosecute piracy and armed robbery at sea and convict perpetrators is weak, and as a result, most of these cases go unprosecuted. Tackling these challenges requires a holistic and multi-sectoral approach that addresses the social, political, and economic causes of crime and violence.

Smuggling by sea in the South American region

Smuggling is another major challenge for maritime security in South American countries. The region is known for drug trafficking, and many criminal organizations also use the sea to smuggle weapons, gasoline, and other illegal goods. As mentioned in the introduction, the complex coastlines complicate monitoring and controlling maritime traffic, thereby facilitating smugglers' evasion of detection.

Some South American countries are significant producers of illegal drugs, such as cocaine-hydrochloride and cannabis. Drug traffickers mainly use the sea to transport their products from the producing countries to the consumers, located mainly in North America, Europe, and Asia. At the same time, weapons and other counterfeit goods travel in the opposite direction, mainly from developed countries such as the United States of America to countries in the South of the continent.^{13,14,15} Recently, ecstasy pills and other synthetic drugs have also begun to appear more frequently in north-south smuggling shipments. Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia are the leading producers of cocaine hydrochloride. At least two routes are configured to transport drugs from northern ~~countries~~¹⁶. The first route uses regions, such as the Colombian and Ecuadorian Pacific, which facilitate the action of organized crime groups dedicated to these activities due to their geographical complexity. These routes mainly lead to Central American transit countries to tranship the loads and get them to the U.S. market by land. Another route transports the drugs by land from these countries to secondary countries, such as Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile.^{16,17} From there, drug cartels send ~~loads~~¹⁸ to ~~the~~¹⁹.

⁹ Rodríguez 2022.

¹⁰ Ellis 2019.

¹¹ Bunbury 2016.

¹² Lara-Martínez 2020.

¹³ UNODC 2019.

¹⁴ Palma et al. 2023.

¹⁵ UNODC 2023.

¹⁶ Doherty and den Held 2023.

¹⁷ Oliveira 2022.

¹⁹ Marajh 2016.

Drug trafficking in the region often involves the use of several methods and tactics designed to evade detection by law enforcement. Some of the most common methods used for drug trafficking in this region include:

1. Smuggling drugs in containers: criminal organizations often conceal drugs in shipping containers. The drugs are concealed within the legitimate cargo or in false compartments or other hiding places inside the container. For many years, the main ports of departure for these cargoes were those of the producer countries; today, it has become evident that this practice has shifted to ports in countries considered secondary or distant from them. For example, in 2019, U.S. customs authorities intercepted the largest cocaine shipment (around 16.5 tonnes) found in containers on U.S. soil in the port of Philadelphia. Evidence indicates that the drugs were taken on board by the ship's crew in Chilean ports or while navigating the waters off the Latin American coast during the voyage between Chile and Panama. UNODC (2023) indicates that there has been a recent increase in shipments leaving Argentinean, Uruguayan, and Brazilian ports using this modality.
2. Transport of drugs in small and fast boats and vessels: Criminals use small vessels, such as fishing boats, sailboats, and speedboats, to transport drugs by sea. The fishing boats serve in two ways: either as refueling platforms for the *go-fast* or, as evidenced in the transporting scheme mentioned above, to conduct pick up at sea or transport drug consignments from the coast to vessels on the high seas. Some boats, known as *go-fast* boats, are fitted with more outboard engines than they usually use, achieving high speeds and thus facilitating evasive maneuvers against the action of the authorities. Owner-operated sailboats and pleasure yachts are used, in some cases, to transport smaller quantities of drugs between ports, mainly in the Caribbean.
3. Use of semi-submersibles: Criminal organizations have implemented specially designed semi-submersibles to transport drugs by sea. Depending on their size, these rustic vessels can carry several tons of drugs and sail long distances with a small crew. These vessels are often challenging to detect and can operate for an extended period of time. They are sometimes used to bring shipments of money back to the producing countries, which are then laundered in local economies. A perfect example of this mode of transport is the case of the semi-submersible captured off the coast of Galicia in 2019 by the Spanish Civil Guard. Between October and November of that year, three crew members traveled around 3,500 nautical miles between South America and Europe carrying around three tons of drugs. In March 2023, another one was found, indicating that this is not an isolated case but a growing trend.

The illegal drug trade damages social cohesion, undermines the rule of law, and erodes public trust in government institutions and citizen security. Conversely, smuggling commercial goods, like tobacco and alcohol, into local markets without proper customs procedures has been a long-standing practice. Smuggling inflicts severe consequences on South American countries regarding public health and security. Arms smuggling, in particular, fuels political violence and criminal activities, leading to numerous deaths across the region. Additionally, smuggling negatively impacts the economies of South American countries. Evasion of customs duties creates unfair competition for domestic producers, exacerbates poverty, reduces tax revenue, and poses health and security risks. Petrol smuggling, driven by price differentials and shortages, remains a persistent issue, particularly in the Caribbean. This illicit activity has led to the rise of smuggling mafias, adversely affecting local economies and fuel markets.

Countermeasures to Combat Piracy and Smuggling in the South American region.

South American countries have implemented various countermeasures to combat piracy and smuggling. These measures aim to enhance maritime security and reduce the threat posed by local or transnational criminal organizations' actions. Overall, armed robbery and drug trafficking are complex and

multifaceted issues. Criminal organizations use various tactics to evade detection and transport drugs by sea. Law enforcement agencies in the region have employed a range of strategies, including intelligence gathering, interdiction operations, and international cooperation, to combat this threat effectively.

Surveillance and Monitoring capabilities

One of the primary countermeasures against piracy and smuggling is the implementation of surveillance and monitoring systems. South American countries have invested heavily in maritime surveillance systems that allow them to monitor their waters and detect suspicious activities. These systems include radar and satellite technology, which provide real-time information about vessel movements in the region, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and patrol boats to monitor their territorial waters. Additionally, some countries have established maritime security or fusion centers that allow for the centralization of maritime security operations and coordination of efforts to combat piracy and smuggling. For example, between 2000 and 2022, the Colombian Navy increased its coastguard fleet by more than 500%.²⁰

Improved Legal Frameworks

South American countries have also implemented new laws and regulations to combat piracy and smuggling.^{21,22} These laws provide a legal basis for prosecuting pirates and smugglers and for the seizure of their assets. The legal framework has provided greater cooperation among law enforcement agencies in different countries. For example, Colombia created at least one new criminal typology and performed/conducted an essential legal procedural change to prosecute people committing crimes at sea. The new typology regards submersibles' design, construction, and use of traffic drugs. At the same time, the procedural change allows the Colombian Navy to execute maritime interdiction operations based on the presumption of the current involvement of a vessel in drug trafficking at sea. It is important to mention that, like much of the navies in the world, the Colombian Navy does not have crime scene investigation jurisdiction.²³

Enhanced Maritime Law Enforcement

Another crucial countermeasure against piracy and smuggling is the deployment of law enforcement personnel. South American countries have increased maritime police presence to deter piracy and smuggling activities. Maritime police regularly patrol the waterways, inspect vessels, and check for illegal activities. Furthermore, some countries have established specialized maritime police units trained to deal with piracy and smuggling activities. As an example, Argentina implemented the Joint Maritime Command, bringing together for the first time the efforts of the Argentine military forces with internal security forces to reinforce control and patrolling in Argentina's exclusive economic zone.²⁴

Implementation of International Cooperation Mechanisms

²⁰ Rivera-Paez 2023.

²¹ Enrique 2021.

²² Valdés 2022.

²³ Fiscalía General de la Nación 2017.

²⁴ Delgado 2022.

International cooperation is a critical countermeasure to combat piracy and smuggling. South American countries have enhanced maritime security by improving regional cooperation and intelligence sharing.²⁵ Various international cooperation mechanisms contribute to combating maritime crime and strengthening regional security by facilitating information-sharing, promoting best practices, and supporting joint operations and training programs. Some of them include:

1. The Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE) - This subdivision of the Organization of American States (OAS) focuses on preventing, combating, and eliminating terrorism, including maritime terrorism, in the Western Hemisphere. The CICTE promotes cooperation and coordination among member states and supports the implementation of international legal frameworks related to terrorism. While its primary focus is on counterterrorism, CICTE also supports initiatives to address other forms of transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking and money laundering.
2. Coordination for the South Atlantic Area (CAMAS) - This is a joint initiative between Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay to improve regional maritime security. The CAMAS coordinates maritime patrols and intelligence-sharing efforts among member countries to combat maritime crime, including drug trafficking and smuggling.
3. Operational Network for Regional Cooperation among Maritime Authorities (ROCRAM) - This network of maritime authorities from South and Central American countries promotes cooperation and information sharing related to maritime safety, security, and environmental protection.
4. UNODC-GMCP Strategic Vision: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released a strategic vision to support Latin American and Caribbean countries in strengthening responses to prevent and tackle organized crime, drugs, and corruption at and by sea. In 2019, the Global Maritime Crime Program opened an office for the Latin American region in the Dominican Republic. Since then, law enforcement enhancement and capacity-building programs have been implemented to reduce the effects of maritime crime in the region.

South American countries have also developed international maritime operations to address maritime crime in their waters. These operations are often conducted in cooperation with countries from other regions and, sometimes, with international organizations, and they have involved a range of activities, including patrols, inspections, and interdictions. Here are some examples of combined operations against maritime crime that South American countries have developed:

1. Campaign Martillo is a multinational detection, monitoring, and interdiction operation that includes U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels, aircraft from U.S. federal law enforcement agencies, and military and law enforcement units from various nations. They are working together to deny transnational criminal organizations the ability to exploit these transshipment routes for the movement of narcotics, precursor chemicals, bulk cash, and weapons along Central American shipping routes. 14 countries are participating: Belize, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Honduras, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Chile has also contributed to the operation.²⁶
2. The Campaign ORION is an International Naval Campaign against Drug Trafficking led by Colombia. It is a strategic alliance under the framework of international cooperation agreements to maintain the offensive against drug trafficking in the region. In the last version (ORION XI) in 2023, 40 countries from Africa, America, and Europe participated, seizing “182 tons of cocaine, 259 tons of marijuana, 8.7 tons of coca base and 150 kilograms of hashish, affecting the finances of

²⁵ Domergue 2023.

²⁶ Tallis 2022.

transnational crime organizations amounting to more than USD 7.7 billion from illegal revenues”.²⁷ With the cooperation of an average of 32 countries, the different iterations of the campaign resulted in the seizure of more than 1850 tonnes of cocaine and 600 tonnes of marijuana, the immobilization of hundreds of vessels, and the capture of at least 4,500 people in maritime interdiction operations.²⁸

3. EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation: Mechanism on drugs promoting and enhancing opportunities for information exchange, coordination, and cooperation among competent authorities responsible for drug policies in the EU and the Community of Caribbean and Latin American States (CELAC). It includes at least three mechanisms of cooperation: The Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP), the Cocaine Route Programme (CRP), and the Cocaine Route Monitoring and Support (CORMS).^{29,30}
4. Container Security Initiative (CSI): Under the CSI, Customs and Border Protection staff are placed at foreign seaports to screen containers for weapons of mass destruction.³¹
5. Operation Ágata is a joint operation conducted by the armed forces of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela aimed at addressing a range of transnational criminal activities, including drug trafficking, illegal mining, and environmental crimes. The operation involves coordinated patrols along the countries' borders and coastal areas.³²

Final Remarks and Conclusions

Some key elements to analyze maritime crime in South America and the Caribbean are the weak public maritime governance schemes and the low capacity to implement the rule of law. Unfortunately, justice systems are incredibly unproductive in this region. From another perspective, unequal socioeconomic conditions and substantial distance to power correlate with the practical implications of transnational organized crime actors. Another critical element is sea blindness perspectives along the region. Actors need to understand the importance of the maritime domain and the activities developing in it. Finally, geopolitical instability and weak articulation of international cooperation in the diverse geographical scenarios that characterize the region, profoundly impact how the phenomenon is combatted.³³

Conclusively, maritime security challenges such as piracy and smuggling pose a significant threat to the security and economy of South American countries. However, these challenges have been addressed through enhanced maritime surveillance, regional cooperation and intelligence sharing, increased maritime law enforcement, and improved legal frameworks. The strategies adopted by Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru are steps in the right direction. However, more must be done to combat piracy and smuggling in the region. It is convenient to define specific actions to mitigate threats, thinking in a *capacity-building* and a *comprehensive-government approach* model, as there is a need to simultaneously act at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels to prioritize dismantling organizations over seizing tactical shipments. For example, as is well known, interdiction at sea or in the air produces the highest impact on the production and commercialization chain of cocaine in terms of costs for criminal organizations. Therefore, increasing maritime and aerial interdiction capabilities could be crucial to fight smuggling in the region. However, knowing that there are unclear criminal justice policies, unclear judicial police jurisdictions, and a lack of knowledge of the sea as a

²⁷ Armada de Colombia (2023). Orión: la campaña naval de lucha contra el narcotráfico más exitosa a nivel mundial. <https://www.armada.mil.co/es/content/orion-campana-naval-lucha-contra-narcotrafico-mas-exitosa-nivel-mundial?page=show>

²⁸ Rivera-Paez 2020.

²⁹ Núñez and Rodríguez 2021.

³⁰ Prefectura Naval Argentina 2023

³¹ Zhang and Roe 2019.

³² Moury 2022.

³³ Griffith 1995.

crime scene, understanding the need to work at the national level to seek judicial reforms in these matters could be more relevant.³⁴

U.S. interests and support highly influence the international security complex in the region. This influence is problematic as its approach is primarily punitive and coercive. It is founded on an order-based security approach, not a public security perspective derived from managing social conflicts. To reduce the supply of drugs from South America, it is critical to definitively dismantle the social, institutional, economic, and security conditions that support drug production and trafficking and facilitate the emergence of criminal structures that dispute the authority and validity of the States. Without this, it will remain a challenge to affect these organizations at the strategic level.

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³⁴ Cafferata and Scartascini 2021.

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IUU Fishing and South American Navies

Wilder Alejandro Sanchez

South American Navies are heavily involved in combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) across the region. The problem is not new, but IUU fishing has grown exponentially due to distant water fishing (DWF) fleets operating in the South Atlantic and Eastern Pacific, often crossing into exclusive economic zones (EEZs) to conduct their illegal activities.

Regional navies have a plethora of missions and challenges, such as maintaining deterrence capabilities for a potential inter-state conflict and internal security operations. Because of the global population growth, decreasing maritime resources elsewhere, and the importance of fishing industries for job creation and food security, IUU fishing is not solely a crime; it is a matter of national security. From a geopolitical point of view, IUU fishing occurs at a time when South American inter-state relations are generally cordial (Venezuela's aggressive *Nicolás* Maduro regime notwithstanding), the possibility of inter-state warfare is low, and military confidence-building mechanisms appear to be working. Hence, South American navies have the opportunity to focus more on non-traditional operations, like cracking down on IUU fishing. This analysis will discuss some limitations and challenges and propose initiatives regional navies can carry out to be more effective at combating IUU fishing.

The Problem

Much has been written about IUU fishing in the Western Hemisphere, so we will only briefly describe the situation to focus on the role of regional navies.¹ First, IUU fishing in seas can be divided into three levels:

1. Domestic: Fishing vessels from country "X" operate within the territorial waters or EEZs of the countries where the crew is from. These fleets are primarily composed of artisanal fishing vessels. For example, in April, the Chilean Navy stopped two local vessels operating without authorization in the Los Lagos region with 1.9 tons of Chilean mussels aboard.²

2. Regional: Fishing vessels from country "X" voyage to neighboring country "Y" and operate in their territorial waters or EEZs. Virtually every regional country has this type of problem. Ecuadorian vessels operate in Peru; Brazilian vessels operate in Uruguay; and Central American and Caribbean vessels operate in Colombian waters. Like the domestic problem, these vessels are artisanal ships. In one recent case, Colombian Coast Guard vessels, assigned to the Pacific Fleet, stopped four vessels with Ecuadorian nationals aboard and around 560 kg of fish obtained without authorization.³

3. Extra-regional: DWF fleets voyage to South American waters; they claim to operate in international waters, but widespread evidence shows these fleets crossing into the EEZs of several countries. The fleets can number hundreds of ships, most of which come from China.⁴ However, reports show some also come from Spain, among other countries.⁵ The fleets move following seasonal patterns, crossing the Drake Passage and Magellan Strait to travel from the South Atlantic, around Argentina, to the Eastern Pacific, voyaging as far north as the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador.

1 For example see the 2022 report by American University and Insight Crime, "IUU Fishing Crimes in Latin America and the Caribbean," also Seminario et al, "Development Solutions to Address Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing" and Pew, "Cómo acabar con la pesca ilegal: el papel del Estado del pabellón"

2 Chilean Navy, X/Twitter, April 2024

3 Colombian Navy, "Armada de Colombia incauta más de 700 kilogramos"

4 Carvalho, "Chinese IUU fishing" also see Delgado, "Flota china de pesca ilegal avanza en Perú"

5 Eco.news, "Pesca ilegal: España sancionó a barcos que operaban en Argentina"

It is also important to note that most research and media articles primarily focus on IUU fishing when it occurs at sea, due to the presence of DWF fleets. However, IUU fishing also occurs in inland water bodies, meaning rivers and lakes. Law enforcement agencies and militaries are also cracking down on this crime. For example, the Colombian Navy has seized over one ton of clams illegally retrieved in the Magdalena River.⁶ Similarly, there is IUU fishing across the Amazon, including in the border areas between Brazil, Colombia, and Peru.⁷ This essay will focus on IUU fishing in the Caribbean, South Atlantic, and Eastern Pacific, but additional academic research on IUU fishing across rivers and lakes is necessary.⁸

While the consequences of IUU fishing are fairly obvious, it is essential to remember them. IUU fishing is not simply a crime but a matter of national security. This practice hurts a country's legitimate fishing industry, which affects jobs and revenue. Moreover, predatory and destructive fishing, mainly by DWF fleets and their trawlers, destroys a country's maritime wealth, leaving little or nothing for local communities. To explain the situation more clearly, if a DWF fleet destroys Northern Peru's waters, there will be little to no fish to sustain local fishing industries in regions like Tumbes and Piura. Unemployment will occur, and probably instability as fishermen, port workers and the workers of legal fisheries protest. Moreover, removing this food source will mean fish prices will skyrocket in Peru, hurting the lower socio-economic classes the most. Since South America remains largely a developing region, with growing local populations and problematic levels of poverty, IUU fishing de-stabilizes local communities. Moreover, IUU fishing has terrible effects on food security, local economies and legal jobs, turning it into a national security problem.

Navies, the first line of Defense

South American navies are actively engaged in cracking down on IUU fishing as underwater, surface, and aerial assets have been deployed to crack on this crime. Some examples help explain the situation. Peru has deployed frigates and coastal patrol vessels to monitor its waters. Similarly, when a DWF fleet sailed through Chile's Juan Fernández Island Maritime Reserve (Parque Marítimo Protegido Isla Juan Fernández) around December 2023, Santiago deployed one of its submarines.⁹ The patrol vessel LSG Punta Arenas has also been deployed. Meanwhile, Argentina has deployed assets like corvette ARA Espora offshore patrol vessel ARA Contralmirante Cordero, and Coast Guard patrol vessel Derbes.

While this analysis focuses on the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries of South America, IUU fishing also occurs in Guyana, Suriname, and French Guyana (an overseas territory of France); the defense forces of these countries are similarly engaged in cracking down on this crime. The Guyana Defence Force (GDF) Coast Guard (GDFCG) has received a brand-new ship, the offshore patrol vessel GDFS Berbice. The most modern vessel in the GDF's fleet will be tasked with patrolling Guyana's EEZ to "counter a range of illicit activities," including IUU fishing.¹⁰ Suriname's National Army's Navy (Marine van het Nationaal Leger), Coast Guard, and Police Corps commenced the interdepartmental maritime Operation Sparimakka on 27 May 2024, to crack down on border crimes, including crimes along the mouth of the Corantijn and Nickerie rivers. One of the goals is to combat IUU fishing, which "hinders sustainable fishing and poses a threat to exports."¹¹ Moreover, the French Forces in Guyana (Forces Armées en Guyane) and the Gendarmerie Nationale work together to combat IUU fishing. On 26 October 2024, the forces announced that as part of Operation MAKO, "60 km of net and 28 tons of

6 Joint Command, Armed Forces (Colombia), "Armada de Colombia incauta más de una tonelada de pesca ilegal"

7 Pedroso et al, "La triple frontera de la pesca ilegal: mafias e impunidad detrás del tráfico en la Amazonía"

8 Therefore, we will not discuss the navies of Bolivia and Paraguay

9 Navy (Chile), X/Twitter

10 Chabrol, "Renamed GDF Coast Guard offshore patrol vessel arriving soon after rough sea trials"

11 Ministry of Defense (Suriname), "Meer illegale Guyanezen in Brazilianen aangehouden tijdens Operatie Sparimakka"

fish” illegally obtained were seized.¹² Photos released by the French forces show a rusty vessel boarded and searched by military personnel.

Washington’s assistance

The US Navy and US Coast Guard are also active in South America to assist regional partners in combating IUU fishing. A noteworthy development occurred in late 2023. The crews of the Coast Guard Cutters Alder, Terrell Horne, and a Lockheed HC-130 Hercules aircraft conducted the first high-seas boardings and inspections in the Eastern Pacific under a newly adopted conservation and management measure to monitor and inspect fishing and transshipment operations at-sea in the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO) Convention Area. The operation took place off the coast of Peru.

Training between the US and South America to counter IUU is also ongoing. For example, USCG Jame (WMSL 754) and Argentine patrol vessel Doctor Manuel Mantilla (GC 24) held joint training to stop IUU fishing in the South Atlantic. Multinational exercises also focus on IUU fishing, specifically exercise GALAPEX. The GALEPEX II 2023 exercise took place in Santa Cruz, in Ecuador’s Galapagos Islands, with representatives from the navies and coast guards of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the European Union, France, Italy, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The platforms that participated included a frigate from the Peruvian Navy, two US Coast Guard cutters, six surface units from the Ecuadorian Navy, and two aircraft from the Naval Aviation Command.

Violence

Generally speaking, IUU fishing is a non-violent crime: when IUU vessels, primarily those that fish domestically and regionally, are detected by coast guards and navies, they will surrender or attempt to flee. The situation is different when we discuss DWF fleets. These ships, much heavier than their artisanal counterparts, also try to escape. However, one incident shows that future interception operations may be more violent. In 2016, the Mantilla-class patrol vessel Prefecto Derbes, assigned to Argentina’s Naval Prefecture (Prefectura Naval), attempted to stop the Chinese fishing trawler *Lu Yan Yuan Yu 010*. However, the ship would ram the *Derbes*, which opened fire in return. Ultimately, the Chinese fishing vessel sank, and the crew was rescued and arrested.

So far, the author of this chapter has not found examples of IUU fishing vessels using weapons to attack South American Coast Guard or Navy ships. However, it is plausible that this scenario could occur in the future. As the global population grows and seas become emptier due to human depredation, pollution, and climate change, governments, fishing companies, and fishing vessel captains will likely become more desperate to secure their sea bounties. Hence, it is likely that there will be more incidents like the *Lu Yan Yuan Yu 010*, as well as other violent incidents involving weapons, in the future.

Discussion

South American navies are actively engaged to stop IUU fishing. However, to be blunt, the Navies are fighting a losing war. There are too many ships involved in IUU fishing compared to the number of vessels (and submarines) any South American navy operates. In the case of DWF fleets, which can number several hundred ships, it is impossible to monitor their operations by deploying a couple of patrol vessels and a lonely MPA aircraft. Moreover, deploying a ship or aircraft to locate one artisanal boat in a big water body like the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans is time-consuming and costly.

¹² Forces Armées en Guyane, Facebook

Another component of the problem is that IUU fishing is only one of the many maritime operations Navies carry out. Locating and intercepting other vessels carrying illicit contraband (e.g., the infamous narco-boats or narco-sub) is another ongoing task, particularly for Colombia and Ecuador. Navies must also train and engage in border patrol operations for deterrence.

Moreover, it is standard for navies not to operate at full capacity as vessels and subs are rotated, as they return to a dock for maintenance, changing crews, and resupplying. Additionally, at any time, some ships (or submarines) will be in local shipyards undergoing repairs and upgrades. Hence, navies only have a very limited number of assets at sea for different missions, including monitoring IUU fishing. The size of a country's waters and fleets does not help the situation. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru have extensive territorial waters and EEZs. Colombia needs to divide its assets between the Caribbean and Pacific theaters. The situation is particularly problematic for Argentina, which has an old fleet and vast waters from the South Atlantic down to Antarctica. Ecuador has to expand the fleet's coverage to monitor the Galapagos Islands. Meanwhile, Uruguay has the smallest and oldest fleet in South America, not including Guyana or Suriname, which makes monitoring and combating IUU fishing even more challenging.

South American navies will need additional assets and assistance to combat IUU fishing. Some policy recommendations are self-evident, while others require thinking "out the box." Given that IUU fishing is not decreasing, and the problem is intensifying due to the predatory DWF fleets, particularly from China, South American Navies and their respective governments need to develop new strategies. Some policy recommendations include:

1. Additional vessels and aerial assets. Navies would particularly benefit from more offshore patrol vessels and other ships that transport helicopters. Helos expand a ship's range for surveillance operations, allowing them to locate artisanal vessels. Helos will be particularly helpful in locating single IUU vessels in the vast ocean, which are more challenging than fishing fleets numbering hundreds of vessels. Similarly navies require more maritime patrol aircraft (MPAs).

2. Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UASs) and Uncrewed Surface Vessels (USVs): South American air forces and armies have adopted UASs, which are imported or domestically produced. They are already utilized for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations. The Brazilian Navy has tested launching UASs from ships. Like MPAs and helicopters, UASs can provide invaluable aerial reconnaissance capabilities.

USVs have yet to break into the South American market. Navies have robots for underwater operations, including underwater SAR missions; however, no South American navy operates USVs at the time of writing. The Brazilian shipyard Emgepron and start-up company Tidewise are working together to develop the Suppressor USV in two variants, seven meters (Suppressor 7) and 11m (Suppressor 11).¹³ USVs could be adapted by the Marinha do Brasil, and if the USVs are successfully used in Brazil, they could then be acquired by other regional navies. USVs could be transported aboard large vessels to, like UASs, expand a ship's ISR capabilities.

With that said, it is unclear if South American navies will adopt USVs. Some reasons include the "culture" of regional navies, which prefer traditional, crewed ships, and the budgets of navies and defense ministries. Moreover, "there are obvious physical and technical requirements for a ship to transport and operate a USV, which means some basic adaptations will be needed for any ship to utilize this new technology."¹⁴ Navies with older vessels or a surface fleet composed of small vessels, for example Uruguay, will be less likely to acquire USVs.

4. Regional cooperation and national sovereignty: Latin America and the Caribbean have not experienced inter-state warfare since the 1995 war between Ecuador and Peru, while the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War between Argentina was the last regional conflict to have a maritime theater of operations. Inter-state relations are fairly strong, and confidence-building mechanisms are working.¹⁵ South American navies often train together via bilateral and multinational exercises, including the US-

13 Sánchez, "Emgepron and Tidewise team up to develop first 'made-in-Brazil' USV"

14 Sánchez, "Do USVs Have a Future in Latin American and Caribbean Navies?"

15 There are some inter-state tensions, border disputes, and occasional threatening statements by Venezuelan President Maduro towards Guyana.

sponsored multinational exercise UNITAS. However, national sovereignty is vigorously protected, and historical disputes mean cooperation will only go so far.

There must be more cooperation between regional navies (and governments in general) to combat IUU fishing. As this essay has argued, no Navy has sufficient ships, submarines, and aerial assets to comprehensively monitor territorial waters and EEZs on their own. One alternative could be to create bilateral or regional task forces in which vessels from one country can operate in another country's waters to monitor IUU vessels. One model to follow is the Shiprider agreement the US utilizes in the Caribbean. A simple way to describe Shiprider is that a law enforcement officer from a country, for example Jamaica, travels aboard a US Coast Guard (USCG) vessel and can even operate in the waters of the Caribbean nation from which the officer comes.¹⁶ When the vessel intercepts a suspicious vessel, the officer aboard makes the arrest, even though only one officer is doing it. A similar model could be applied to South America.

Another alternative is to expand the Inter-American Reciprocal Assistance Treaty (Tratado Inter-Americano de Asistencia Recíproca: TIAR), more commonly known as the Rio Treaty or the Rio Pact. The TIAR was created in 1947 and is known for Article 3, a clause that calls for collective security should one of its members be attacked.¹⁷ This author has proposed modernizing the TIAR into a TIAR 21 version so the document becomes more relevant and valuable to current Western Hemisphere geopolitics, realities, and challenges.¹⁸

TIAR has been amended in the past and could be amended again to include IUU Fishing—articles 5, 9, and 11 address regional security issues.¹⁹ While none of these articles mentions IUU by name or directly addresses transnational, non-traditional security threats such as IUU fishing, we could argue that the spirit of some of these articles addresses this particular challenge. The fact that TIAR has been invoked to apply sanctions against the Maduro government in Venezuela serves as a precedent for the Treaty to be utilized on issues not directly linked to military aggressions by extra-hemispheric powers. Another possibility is the overhaul and expansion of TIAR to include non-traditional security threats like IUU fishing. This new version could combine the existing document and other international agreements that focus on maritime issues, like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This new document, which the author of this essay calls the TIAR 21, could be activated by parties when IUU fishing vessels operate close to their borders so neighboring states can deploy naval assets to support patrol and, if necessary, interception operations.

While this analysis focuses on the role of navies vis-a-vis IUU fishing, national governments also assist navies and law enforcement agencies in tackling this crime. Ministries of foreign affairs can help by negotiating new IUU fishing-related agreements with neighboring states, like the proposed TIAR 21. UNCLOS, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's Agreement on Port State Measures, the International Labour Organization's Work in Fishing Convention No. 188 (C188), and the International Maritime Organization's Cape Town Agreement are all agreements that can provide more legal support to the activities of South American navies. South American governments must also use these existing agreements, maybe by incorporating them into TIAR 21 or to increase regional military cooperation to address this national security challenge.

16 Diwon, "Balancing Security and Sovereignty in Jamaica"

17 The Treaty has been invoked around 20 times since its inception, such as to support the U.S. blockade against Cuba during the missile crisis. The treaty was also invoked after the 9/11 attacks. Most recently, in late 2019, parties to TIAR invoked it as part of a regional strategy to pressure the regime of President Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela. Thirtieth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, RC.30/RES 2/19.

18 Sánchez, "TIAR 21: Maritime security, the TIAR, and IUU fishing in the Western Hemisphere," Also see: Sánchez, "How Latin American Navies Combat Illegal, Unreported, or Unregulated Fishing"

19 For example, Article 5 explains how the TIAR's council can meet if there is "a conflict or serious event that might endanger the peace of America," while Article 9 mentions how "the sending by or on behalf of a State of armed bands, groups, irregulars or mercenaries, which carry out acts of armed force against another State." Similarly, Article 11 mentions how "the High Contracting Parties recognize that, for the maintenance of peace and security in the Hemisphere, collective economic security for the development of the Member States of the Organization of American States must also be guaranteed." It goes without saying that economic security for coastal nations includes the fishing industry.

The curious case of BAE Hualcopo

What should governments do with the seized ships engaged in IUU fishing? This answer falls under the jurisdiction of South American judicial systems. Tragically, as many media reports show, IUU fishing vessels, particularly those from China that operate in the region, can easily dock in South American ports, unload their cargo, and resupply and refuel with impunity, prompting anger from local populations, mainly local fishermen.

However, one incident could serve as a blueprint for the future of combating IUU fishing. The Chinese fishing vessel *Fu Yuan Yu Leng* 999 was detained in 2017 by Ecuador for operating without authorization by the Galapagos Islands as part of a large Chinese fishing fleet. Upon inspection, authorities found around 300 tons of fish aboard the vessel, including endangered sharks. In 2019 Ecuador's judicial system ruled that the vessel was permanently forfeited and was eventually transferred to the Navy. In July 2020, BAE *Hualcopo*, the former *Fu Yuan Yu Leng* 999, was commissioned into the Ecuadorian Navy. "The ship will carry out support operations for the Ecuadorian navy and may very well be involved in stopping the same IUU fishing activities that it carried out in its previous life."²⁰

Hualcopo sets an interesting precedent. "Certainly, some detained vessels may be too old or incompatible with a navy's requirements and operations, but others could be given a second life, particularly large ships that can be utilized for transportation."²¹ The Navies of Brazil and Colombia are fairly modern, while other countries like Chile and Peru are undergoing ambitious local shipbuilding projects. On the other hand, retrofitted and modernized fishing vessels could be commissioned into the navies of Guyana, Suriname and Uruguay.

Conclusions

South American Navies carry out patrol operations year-round across their country's territorial waters and EEZs year-round to combat IUU fishing. However, this is a never-ending operation, and success is not on the horizon. From small, local and regional artisanal ships, to massive DWF fleets that number hundreds of ships, regional navies are in a perpetual locate and arrest IUU fishing vessels. As this essay has argued, Navies need help to perform this mission more effectively. Additional assets, specially offshore patrol vessels, helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft are necessary. However, new technologies could also be helpful, like for example UASs and USVs. Moreover, new strategies, like a South American Shiprider or a TIAR21 that allows joint patrols and cross-border interception operations, are required to combat IUU fishing more effectively.

²⁰ Sánchez, "The Ecuadorian Navy's constant struggle against IUU fishing"

²¹ *Ibid*

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Geopolitical Challenges II: Charting Antarctic Geopolitics: Collaborative Approaches for South American Nations

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SUMMARY: The growing geopolitical importance of Antarctica has led South American countries to prioritize regional integration and cooperation in response to climate change and emerging actors on the continent. The Antarctic context brings to the fore a deeper questioning about the possibilities of convergence of polar policies and associated practices, such as the creation of supranational institutions and the consolidation of joint strategies. Instruments such as the Annual Meetings of Latin American Antarctic Program Administrators (RAPAL) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), help to project regional interests and strategies. Under the scope of international alliances, the BRICS Ocean and Polar Science and Technology Working Group intensifies polar cooperation among BRICS countries and strategically enhances their projection of power. New issues, such as the influence of powers like China and Russia in light of the war in Ukraine, as well as the increasing mineral needs of the major powers, are being able to change the geopolitical dynamics in Antarctica. As a result, it causes South American countries to proactively address potential changes in the dynamics of the Antarctic Treaty System by prioritizing regional interests over individual governmental concerns.

Introduction

Antarctica holds a strategic significance for South America. Located in the southernmost portion of the globe, the sixth continent represents an important window of opportunity for South American countries. In particular, the vertiginous expansion of geopolitical interests in the continent consolidated the presence of the countries of the Southern Cone, favored by their geographic proximity. The performance of these actors is enlisted by their polar policies, based on their national dimensions, both ideological and cultural. In this sense, there is a fruitful interaction between South American countries due to their political, economic, and geographic interconnections, established through a common element: the assiduous dynamics of regional integration. Its Antarctic programs are articulated as the continent becomes a strategic route for foreign policy.

Antarctica is the only continent that has no native population, setting it apart from most of the dynamics of advancement of the international system. Based on the principle of a *res communis*, the continent has consolidated itself as a testing ground for international treaties, operating under the logic of international cooperation. Absent from state sovereignty, the territory has significant strategic potential. To curb the wave of territorial claims that began in the early twentieth century, the Antarctic Treaty (1959)¹ emerged as an effective option to establish peace on the continent. The Treaty entered into force in 1961 and twelve countries signed it (South Africa, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, the United States of America, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Russia). It currently has 56 members and 29 advisory members with voting and veto rights.

The Southern Cone countries occupy a prominent role in Antarctica, made possible by the growing deepening of their regional cooperation relations. On the one hand, the insertion of Argentina and Chile

¹ "The Antarctic Treaty was signed in Washington on 1 December 1959 by the twelve countries whose scientists had been active in and around Antarctica during the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957-58. It entered into force in 1961 and has since been acceded to by many other nations. The total number of Parties to the Treaty is now 56" (Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty).

in the continent follows the structure of their territorial claims, while Brazil has legitimized its presence with the insertion of Antarctica as part of the Brazilian Strategic Environment, based on the National Defense Policy (2012).² At the same time, Uruguay is included through its Artigas Station, founded in 1984, and the Science Station Antarctica *Ruperto Elchiribehety*. On the other hand, apart from the involvement of their neighbors in the Southern Cone, only Paraguay does not have an Antarctic program, although it has a close political and economic relationship with its neighbors.

The insertion of South American countries is conditioned by the logic of the dynamics of the international system, which guide and scale the complexity of their Antarctic programs. This process is often influenced by other more powerful actors, such as the United States, China, and Russia. Their growing presence translates, on several occasions, into alignment policies. The relational dynamics of these major actors with South American countries directly impact the Antarctic geopolitical arrangement, especially under the scope of the BRICS alliances, consolidated by the BRICS Ocean and Polar Science and Technology Working Group.

Consequently, the interaction between strategic diplomacy and science is the key to making effective decisions at the regional level until they reach the layer of global governance. In the case of South American countries, this movement was initially favored by the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), created in 2008, and a gradual process of reactivation. Additionally, at another time and from the perspective of Latin American countries, by the Meeting of Administrators of Latin American Antarctic Programs (RAPAL), which first took place in 1990.

The purpose of this work is to raise considerations about the relationships and interests of actors in the sixth continent, including a special cut for the claiming South American countries. We will provide a brief historical overview of the legal landscape of the Antarctic continent, followed by an examination of the presence of South American countries in the territory, as well as the significance of Antarctica for these South American nations. Subsequently, we will address the impact of global powers on the posture of South American countries on the continent, passing through the new strategic instruments of alliances, policies, and cooperation projects.

The Growing Geopolitical Importance of Antarctica

Antarctica emerges as one of the few areas removed from the dynamics of human development, where geopolitics and strategy gradually intertwine amidst the increasing global resource scarcity. This uncharted landscape, which bore witness to the daring expeditions of the 19th century, ultimately catalyzed an impassioned territorial debate in the 20th century. Theories of occupation gained prominence, each ardently seeking to confer legitimacy upon the territorial claims of the states that ventured into the sixth continent.

To understand the legal particularity of the sixth continent, it is necessary to relate the role of Antarctica in the International System, under the scope of International Law, and its status as common heritage of humanity. The legal background of the territory is directly linked to international spaces, and, aiming to curb the perpetuation of new explored areas, the Antarctic Treaty (1959) was formalized to establish an equitable and communal administration of the continent's natural resources for the benefit of all humanity, dedicated to peace and science.

The continent has become a "testing ground" for recently crafted international treaties geared toward a new era of global cooperation. Within the realm of public international law, the recent transition of the territory, which initially bore the marks of territorial disputes with no specific sovereignty (*res nullius*)³,

² Brasil. Política Nacional de Defesa (PND). Ministério da Defesa. Brasília, 2012.

³ Translation for "no man's land". According to Husek (2019), as long as the system remains under the dominion of states and the relationship between them and areas situated beyond the reach of state sovereignty equate to

has shifted toward a focus on peace and science, solidifying itself as the common heritage of humanity (*res communis*⁴) at a later stage. This transition underscores the significance of recent studies in International Relations for prospecting and investigating this change in status.

A relevant point, subject to criticism and even raising doubts about the actual resolution of territorial claims, is Article IV of the Treaty. This article imposed a moratorium that "froze" territorial claims over certain areas and prohibited new claims. It is noted, thus, that the old territorial claims were not discarded. Therefore, this legal instrument shapes the geopolitical configuration of the continent through a series of tensions generated by the maintenance of these claims, even if not recognized by other states. In its legal provisions, the Antarctic Treaty envisions the possibility of a review in 2048. Hence, much of the importance of gaining comparative advantages and strengthening strategic alliances in Antarctica is associated with states' efforts to secure their old territorial claims for a possible treaty review.

Another point of fragility on the continent is the process of climate change, which is accelerating the thawing process in Antarctica, making fishing and oil reservoirs increasingly accessible and economically viable. The significance of strategic partnerships has evolved in parallel with the recent climate impacts on the continent and with the new actors on the Antarctic geopolitical board. Although the Antarctic Treaty, under the scope of the Convention on Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), an important mechanism of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), helps to minimize and influence the continent's exploratory activities, the climate emergency is making its future exceptionally delicate. The environmental issue accelerates and intensifies geostrategic competition in new spheres, and the continent becomes the stage for the needs of each nation.

The climate emergency, at the same time, makes the issue of Antarctic fishing worrisome. China's demand for minerals raises concerns for the stability of the Treaty. As far as fisheries are concerned, China has been actively interested in the cultivation of krill. The Russo-Chinese Tipping Point in the Antarctic Treaty System draws attention to the pace at which both often veto preservation resolutions at recent CCAMLR meetings, questioning the preservation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Southern Ocean. This movement is primarily driven by these actors' demand for natural resources and, in the case of China, for being the largest importer of energy on the planet. This proves that CCAMLR is an extremely important forum for States to defend their interests in the Antarctic continent. The strong presence of China and Russia is a sign of their growing zones of influence over South American countries.

However, efforts to achieve new international preservation mechanisms have progressed. Under this scope, aiming at the protection of marine areas, the Treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions (BBNJ), known as the High Seas Treaty, has been in effect since 2023. This Treaty has the scope to develop mechanisms capable of creating new MPAs. Another relevant point is that the BBNJ was created to be compatible with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), expanding its importance in global governance.

South American Claims

Antarctica began to play an important role on the international scene with the hunting of seals and whales, especially between the end of the 18th century and the mid-19th century. The exploration of

nothingness (*res nullius*), they are susceptible to appropriation by the stronger entities. In the concept of international spaces, these areas cannot be subject to appropriation by any state.

⁴ The civil law concept of "*res communes*" from Roman Law primarily pertained to the regime of use that individuals in general could have concerning certain goods qualified as commons, whereas the notion of "common heritage of humanity" in International Law applies primarily, though not exclusively, to states, members of the international community, and is directed towards the harmonious management of domains of common interest (SUCHARUTKUL, 2011).

this inhospitable land was even more encouraged under the commercial and economic aspects while moving the interests of States and explorers. The European presence had been the protagonist since the beginning, and "the British captain James Cook was the first to cross the Antarctic polar circle on January 17, 1773"⁵.

Under the scope of colonial dynamics and its expansionist national strategy, the United Kingdom played a leading role in eight of the fifteen major scientific expeditions made between the last decade of the 19th century and the year 1922. This British interest led, in 1908, to the first formal claim of part of the Antarctic territory.

Under this time frame, a few years before the British claim, Argentina inaugurated the first station in the history of the Antarctic continent in 1904, on Laurie Island, in South Orcadas. Even so, the country's Antarctic territorial claim was made official two decades after the inauguration of its first station, favored by the power vacuum left after World War II, which was marked by the reduction of investments by European countries in the continent.

The dispute between the two actors had its roots in the dispute over the sub-Antarctic islands, the Malvinas Islands, which began in 1833. This rivalry was transferred to the sixth continent and transited between British imperialism and South American nationalism. Nationalism was an important factor for the continued progress of the Argentine presence in the territory, in the sense that the more the country's development expanded, the understanding of territorial nationalism in Antarctica grew in parallel. This trend was observed by neighboring Chile, which gradually started to invest in the region. The idea of a South American Antarctica, therefore, became linked to Argentine-Chilean interests to guarantee a greater space on the continent and was legitimized by occupation theories.

Faced with the Chilean advance, the end of the 1930s is the focal point for the outline of Argentine Antarctic policy. In 1942, the country annexed continental Antarctic territories, declared with the founding of *Argentine Antarctica* on Deception Island. During the same era, Argentina and Chile began to claim territory previously claimed by the United Kingdom, aggravating relations on the continent, especially with the Argentine claim being completely within the area claimed by the British. In addition, the dispute between both South American countries expands over the limitation of Antarctic borders, bringing yet another turning point for the security of the continent.

In the Brazilian case, the first studies on the subject date back to 1956 and inaugurate the foundations of *Brazilian Antarctic Territorialism*, with the "Defrontation Theory"⁶, elaborated by Delgado de Carvalho and Therezinha de Castro. Brazil adhered to the Antarctic Treaty in 1975 and only became a consultative member in 1983. The country formalized the strategic importance of Antarctica when included as part of the strategic environment, made official in the National Defense Policy (PND), of 2012. The year 2012 was also marked by the fire of the Brazilian station (built in 1984), which was reopened in 2020, and named "Comandante Ferraz". The station is considered the most modern on the Antarctic Peninsula.

The Search for a South American Antarctica

Currently, five cities are considered hubs of logistical support for all Antarctic programs, and for tourist trips to the sixth continent: Cape Town, South Africa; Christchurch, New Zealand; Hobart, Australia;

⁵ Child 1988.

⁶ "A possible territorial claim in Antarctic lands was based on the "Defrontation Theory", elaborated by professors linked to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), especially Therezinha de Castro and Carlos Delgado de Carvalho. According to this theory, Antarctica should be divided by the extreme meridians of countries in the South Hemisphere; therefore, Brazil would have right to part of the Antarctic territory. Besides, scholars also mentioned the strong influence of Antarctica in the Brazilian climate as a reason for the claim" (Anrade et al, 2020).

Punta Arenas, Chile; and Ushuaia, Argentina. These countries of gateway represent strategic potentials and become recipients of investments from countries that wish to boost joint operations. This occurs, in large part, due to the natural logistical dependence of Antarctic programs on hubs. In particular, the Brazilian Antarctic Program (PROANTAR) depends on hubs in Chile and Argentina, strengthening their joint projects, previously favored by regional integration. This subsection is also present for other countries in the Northern Hemisphere, as is the case of the United States with the hub in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Being home to two of the five gateway cities, and six (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay) of the 29 consultative member countries of the Antarctic Treaty, South America expands its potential for multilateral cooperation. Under this scope, the alignment with the Antarctic programs of Argentina and Chile becomes precious. This rapprochement between the South American countries gradually makes the role of each of the neighbors more flexible, increasing their capacities for action. An example of this is the defense of Argentine sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, a topic close to unanimity among South American countries, reflecting the strength of nationalism in the defense of regional interests.

The formalization of cooperation and integration mechanisms at the bilateral level often ends up encouraging the propagation of these institutional arrangements at a macro level. The Meeting of Latin American Antarctic Program Administrators (RAPAL) illustrates this movement and has become one of the most important initiatives regarding Antarctic issues, although within the scope of Latin America. RAPAL has essential mechanisms for coordinating Latin American interests, such as the Scientific, Environmental, and Technical Affairs Commission (CACAT), and the Operational and Logistic Affairs Commission (CAOL). Notably, RAPAL supports a movement towards joint strategic diplomacy among participating countries by providing quorum and strength at ATS consultative member meetings.

Additionally, RAPAL urges greater institutionalization, together with the creation of a permanent secretariat along the lines of the permanent secretariat for the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Treaty (ATCM), headquartered in Buenos Aires since 2004. These requirements would facilitate better coordination of projects and, mainly due to costs, greater regulation of discussion forums and documents could contribute considerably to the synchrony of a program of common interest to the participating countries. Another relevant point would be the regularity of meetings precisely before the ATCMs, to ensure that Latin American countries could arrive at meetings with coordinated interests and claims, leveraging their influence in multilateral debates.

In this direction, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), created in 2008, was initially made up of twelve South American nations and seeks to streamline and strengthen their commercial, cultural, political, and social relations. Although it is currently in the process of being reactivated, the body was one of the pioneers in its attempts to build a regional security community in South America. The South American Defense Council (CDS) represented the dynamism of the institution's defense dialogues and, under the conversations of polar themes, Cardoso adds:

One of the initiatives was the inclusion of Antarctica as an element of the Council's Action Plan for the year 2012. Present in the axis dedicated to Defense Policies, this initiative proposed by Uruguay, recognizes the logistical, scientific, and technical support that the Ministries of Defense services to maintain the physical presence of South American countries, full and adherent members in the Antarctic Continent, sought to develop activities capable of promoting cooperation policies that encourage the presence of these countries in the region (CDS, 2012).⁷

Created in December 2008, the CDS marks an inflection in the trend, verified during the Cold War (1947-1991), of structuring collective military cooperation in the Hemisphere around the USA⁸. The creation of the Council added to the imagery of South American nationalism, which translates into yet another channel for building a joint defense identity. This notion is strengthened by the Argentine

⁷ Cardoso 2018.

⁸ Abdul-Hak, 2013.

announcement, made on April 6, 2023, to rejoin UNASUR. Brazil followed suit and, the following day, also announced its return. The importance of this new beginning channels and serves as a guide for the search for a convergent South American polar agenda.

As an example of such bilateral arrangements, the Antarctic Cooperation Agreement between Brazil and Argentina, signed on January 23, 2023, represents the expansion of the area of activity of these two actors at the South Pole. More than that, it institutionalizes and stimulates bilateral cooperation, expanding its logistical and geographical borders. Moreover, the integration already generated by MERCOSUR, and probably again with UNASUR, enables and intensifies these exchanges, where both countries start to project, as polar actors, new ways of action within the international system.

Shaping Antarctic Alliances: South America Countries and Great Powers

The BRICS group, which until 2022 was made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, is another relevant example of a linkage mechanism to Russian-Chinese influence. The expansion of the group's influence is evidenced by the invitation of six more members to the group in 2023: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Egypt, Iran, and Ethiopia. Within the polar context, Argentina's entry could signify the expansion of its credibility as a polar actor and, more than ever, create a bridge from BRICS to new political, technological, and geographical frontiers on the continent. However, the country's association, which would have taken effect on January 1, 2024, was discarded when Argentina's new president, Javier Milei, decided not to join the BRICS group. This decision not only demonstrates the loss of an important channel of dialogue for Argentina on polar affairs, but also the country's isolation in terms of participation and engagement in important cooperation mechanisms.

To exemplify the role of this mechanism in the sixth continent, at the 9th BRICS Summit, in 2014, Sino-Brazilian cooperation was the stage for the reconstruction of the Antarctic station Comandante Ferraz. China's expertise in constructing four stations on the continent has fostered a trend of cooperation on the part of South American countries with this country. To rebuild it, the Brazilian Navy held an international tender in 2015, in which China National Electronics Import & Export Corp (CEIEC) won with an offer of 99.6 million US-dollars.⁹ This BRICS equation is also positively impacted by the Antarctic hub of Cape Town, in South Africa, being extremely profitable for the countries of the group, facilitating their logistics to the continent and intensifying their technical cooperation relations.

In addition to Sino-Brazilian relations such as the promotion of South-South Cooperation, the alignment between Argentina and China in Antarctica reached one of its peaks in February 2022, when the countries signed an agreement in which the Chinese reaffirmed their support for Argentina's claim to the Malvinas through the "Joint Declaration between the Argentine Republic and the People's Republic of China on Deepening the Argentina-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership"¹⁰. At the same time, President Alberto Fernández reiterated Argentina's support for the 'one China' policy. The reaction to these measures was marked with the British announcement, two months later, of a significant round of polar investments for the Arctic and Antarctica. The Chinese process of alliances with South American countries resumes the skillful vision of association with countries that have a strong historical presence and technological capacity on the continent.

The picture of the Chinese power prospecting dynamics comes up against the challenges and needs that also affect the interests of North Americans. To the same extent, it assists and strengthens Russian desires. This Chinese path of accumulating technology and science adds up to the strategic rapprochement with Argentina and Chile, meaning a triple scientific-operational strategic capacity and, for the three sides, an important expansion of influence. The Chinese support network in South American territory is valuable under the scope of coalitions and strategic projects. It is relevant to

⁹ Embassy of the Republic China in Brazil 2013.

¹⁰ Argentina 2022.

highlight the exponential advance of the Chinese in the territory, illustrated by their arrival in Antarctica only in 1985 and, a few decades later, conquering the feat of having the highest station on the continent (Kunlun Station, 4087m above sea level) and building their fifth station.

In the Russian case, the complexity of the maritime navigability environment becomes less complicated for the country due to its prowess in the Arctic. With the invasion of Ukraine, which started in 2022, the nation does not want to stop being a protagonist in the international system, even though for decades it has been underfinancing its investment in Antarctica, providing competitive space for other polar powers. Even having a greater interest in the Arctic, the Russians do not renounce their presence in Antarctica. The state has the largest fleet of icebreakers in the world and stands out for being the only country with nuclear-powered icebreakers. It is necessary to emphasize that the conflict in Ukraine and the intensification of tensions between the great powers, especially between the USA and Russia, are likely to have consequences for the functioning of the Antarctic Treaty, considering that the effects of multilateral coalitions have spilled over into the Antarctic continent.

The Vostok station, the main Russian Antarctic station, was built in 1957 and, as early as 2021, 90 percent of its infrastructure was worn out. The reconstruction announcement was made official in October 2021 as part of the new strategy to develop the country's polar activities. A large part of the construction cost was funded by Russian billionaire Leonid Mikhelson, the main shareholder and president of the Russian gas company Novatek. From this perspective, the series of polar actions and policies led to the improvement of research, such as that of the company "RosGeo, the state-owned Russian exploration company that operates the Akademik Alexander Karpinsky, says it has been conducting research in Russia's designated part of Antarctica since 1970 to explore for hydrocarbons"¹¹. The various types of involvement, whether intra- or extra-governmental, add to the decades of continuous investment in exploration on the Antarctic continent, demonstrating Russia's expertise in polar affairs.

Another important point that demonstrates Russia's growing engagement on the Antarctic continent was the groundbreaking ceremony for a new wintering complex at Vostok station in January 2024. Vladimir Putin and the President of the Republic of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, took part in the ceremony to launch the operation of a new wintering complex at Vostok station. On that occasion, President Putin's speech emphasized that "One of the main roles in the research and exploration of this continent belongs to our explorers and pioneers. We must not forget the Russian expedition led by naval officers Lazarev and Bellingshausen, who discovered this ice continent, just over two centuries ago"¹². This speech highlights Russia's sense of pioneering spirit and fuels the country's commitment to the continent.

The break in the trend of alignment with the strategic policies of the South American countries around the US shows itself as a new north in the technical cooperation relations of the South American countries, marked by greater autonomy and flexibility. While, there is still great influence from the great powers in some dynamics of South American action, on the other hand, the gradual joint orchestration of South American countries in strategic policies emerges to strengthen and dynamize their common interests, leveraging their actions on the international scene.

Final Considerations

The guiding principles of the respective actions of each South American country in Antarctica run through institutionalizing elements, guided by their Antarctic programs. For each of these actors to have more voice within the context of the ATC, the union of South American countries which was founded

¹¹ Reuters 2023.

¹² Kremlin 2024.

through extra-regional engagement, developed common Antarctic interests. Under this scope, it is necessary that Colombia and Venezuela, which are already observer members, also become consultative members to reinforce the interests of the South American bloc in the ATCM.

Regional integration and cooperation initiatives gain greater engagement from the moment that the interests of participating states are at stake. That is why Regional Antarctic Programs of Latin America (RAPAL) meetings must always be held before ATCM meetings, propagating the specific common objectives of Latin American countries. In addition, the institutionalization of RAPAL, together with a permanent secretariat, could be managed strategically for the interests of Latin American countries. The coordination of meetings, joint agendas, and unified actions would take on an even more comprehensive and representative scope.

South America is the subcontinent geographically closest to Antarctica and all environmental dynamics have a great and considerable impact on the region. In this context, Brazil as the largest country, largest economy, population, and military power in South America, should illustrate its presence in the sixth continent as a regional power. More than that, the Brazilian presence is necessary to seek solid leadership in UNASUR, creating bodies and mechanisms aimed at Antarctic cooperation; as well as inserting itself as a polar actor in institutions related to Latin American initiatives concerning interests in the continent. In this sense, hosting the permanent secretariat of RAPAL, in Brazil, seems a coherent measure. Another important point is the Brazilian opportunity to use the BRICS as a booster of its operational capabilities in Antarctica, taking advantage of the dexterity and technical capabilities of China and Russia on the sixth continent.

Considering the high maintenance costs of stations and Antarctic programs in general, looking into possibilities for joint stations is necessary as a possible and relevant movement is already shown (France and Italy share the *Concordia* station, for example). This initiative among South American countries would be important for regional integration and convergence of their Antarctic programs, including for accelerating the process for Colombia and Venezuela.

Another relevant event is the war in Ukraine that resumes the dynamics of disputes between the Great Powers in the context of the international system. Since Antarctica is the only terrestrial space still without defined sovereignty, and with incalculable mineral and biological riches, the South American countries must act to anticipate what may happen in terms of changes in the Treaty. It is, therefore, necessary to give up on possible regional disputes and think of the South American bloc in geopolitical terms, aiming at the interest of the states and not of governments before the great powers effectively begin to pay more attention to what happens in the high southern latitudes of the planet.

Finally, the alignment of the polar policies of the South American countries allows and legitimizes the convergence of their Antarctic programs, facilitated even more by the hubs from Chile and Argentina. The reactivation of UNASUR, with the return of Argentina and Brazil, becomes increasingly vital for the continuity of cooperation in terms of the defense of these countries, restoring the necessary autonomy so that they can, together, strengthen the interests of the southern continent.

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The Lessons for Europe

South American Maritime Threats and Implications for EU Drug Policy

Rafael D. Uribe-Neira

Introduction

This chapter poses the question of how maritime security challenges in South America affect European security. It focuses on the most prominent security challenge in South America: the cocaine trade. The EU, under the current legal prohibition of drugs, faces a domestic problem, as European criminal actors are winning prominence in drug trafficking, smuggling increasingly larger amounts of cocaine. Looking at the sea, this chapter outlines three implications for EU Drug Policy: 1) Europe should prepare for more cocaine trade as the economic ties between the two regions increase, 2) technology and port infrastructure are open gates for drug trafficking, which raises questions for EU navies and constabulary forces, as well as those supported by the EU. Finally, 3) current counter-narcotic measures on sea, implemented by international cooperation programs SEACOP and MAOC (N), run the risk of overreaching their mandates to other fields such as migration or hindering the unregulated traffic of goods such as gold and rare earths.

Drug trafficking on sea

Drug smuggling, especially the smuggling of cocaine, constitutes a grave security issue at sea for the EU. Colombia, Bolivia and Peru are the three-leading cocaine-producing countries worldwide. And Europe represents - after the US - their second-largest market. Both regions are connected through the sea, the medium through which more than 80 percent of all narcotics are brought to Europe. By using sea lines of communication, not only South American, but European criminal organizations increasingly profit from drug trafficking. For these reasons, European countries are stakeholders in stopping the flow of illicit substances.

The European Union estimates that cocaine demand has reached historical highs (no pun intended). Authorities seized 213 tons in EU member states in 2020 and estimate that nearly 2.2 million people - or 2.2 percent - of EU citizens between the ages of 15 and 34 years used cocaine in 2021.¹ In Europe, the consumer market for cocaine is growing and is estimated to have been worth at least 10.5 billion Euro the same year.²

Given the high demand for narcotics in the Global North, the amount of cocaine on offer has reached record levels.³ While the global size of coca crop cultivation (from Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) was relatively constant at around 200.000 ha. until 2012, it doubled between 2013 and 2017 and sharply increased in 2021 to almost 600.000 ha.⁴, slightly larger than Berlin's urban area⁵. Cocaine production therefore increased from about 600 tons to almost 2000 tons annually over the same period of time.⁶ In

¹ EMCDDA and Europol, "EU Drug Market: Cocaine", last updated May 6 2023, https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/cocaine_en.

² EMCDDA and Europol, *EU Drug Market*, 7.

³ UNODC, *Global Report on Cocaine 2023 - Local Dynamics, Global Challenges* (Vienna: United Nations Publications, 2023), 12, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf.

⁴ UNODC, *Global Report*, 12.

⁵ According to the OECD, Berlin had by 2020 an extension of 5.351.839 km². See "Metropolitan Areas", OECD.Stat, last modified November 2022, <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=CITIES>.

⁶ UNODC, *Global Report*, 12.

Colombia, the largest producer of coca crops, 204,000 ha. were grown and 1,400 tons of cocaine produced that year.⁷

Between the offering countries and the markets where demand is created, drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) use the maritime domain to transport illicit substances. In fact, the importance of maritime routes for drug trafficking cannot be understated. DTOs clearly opt for sea lines of transportation over land or air routes to transport drugs from production hotspots to end users.⁸ Between 2006 and 2008, 77 percent of seized drug shipments towards Europe originated in South American and Caribbean countries.⁹ By 2021, this number increased to 89 percent.¹⁰

Geography partially explains the overt preference for sea lanes over land and air means of transportation. Unlike in the case of drug trafficking towards the US, DTOs shipping drugs to the EU do not have a “land bridge”, i.e. Central America, to diversify routes and therefore reduce the chances of getting caught along the way¹¹. This makes sea lines of communication the obvious choice for anyone tempted to ship illegal substances. A second reason is the wide range of vehicles and maritime infrastructure, DTOs exploit to hide and transport drugs. DTOs easily infiltrate and exploit maritime infrastructure and vehicles for smuggling, which in turn makes detection more difficult. Between 2019 and early 2020, EU authorities estimated that while between 500 and 800 tons of drugs entered or passed through Europe, authorities only seized between 10 or 20 percent of these drugs.¹² Taking into account that one kilogram of cocaine costs up to 28,000 US-dollars wholesale in the US, the same kilogram costs on average 40,000 US-dollars and up to 80,000 US-dollars in Europe.¹³ In consequence, trafficking cocaine to Europe is an increasingly more attractive prospect than targeting the US¹⁴, which leads to the question: What are the implications of increasing smuggling from South America to Europe, when seen from the maritime domain?

Implication 1: Drug trafficking will steadily grow as EU and South American economic ties deepen

The ongoing negotiations between the European Union and MERCOSUR, South America’s Southern Common Market, suggests the potential for shaping a comprehensive free trade agreement. However, a clear side effect of an EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement may be a dramatic increase of drug trafficking exploiting an already vulnerable port infrastructure.

MERCOSUR is a free trade economic association of five South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and suspended-member Venezuela) and seven associate members, (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru and Suriname). In June 2019, both institutions reached a still-to-be-ratified European Union-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement, which expects to eliminate tariffs on 100 percent of EU trade and 90 percent of Mercosur trade. By 2021, the negotiations gained traction as the agreement promises an alternative source of commodities for the EU in its effort to reduce economic

⁷ UNODC, *Survey of Territories Affected by Coca Cultivation, 2021. Executive Summary* (Bogotá: Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la Droga y el Delito and Ministerio de Justicia y del Derecho, 2022), 1, https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Colombia/EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY_19102022.pdf.

⁸ UNODC, *Global Report*, 53.

⁹ Venezuela (51%), the Caribbean countries (11%), Brazil (10%) and Colombia (5%). See Thibault Le Pichon et al., *The Transatlantic Cocaine Market. Research Paper* (n.p.: UNODC - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, April 2011), 25, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Transatlantic_cocaine_market.pdf.

¹⁰ UNODC, *Global Report*, 163.

¹¹ McDermott et al., *The Cocaine Pipeline to Europe. Research Report*. (n.p.: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime and Insight Crime, 2021), 3, <https://insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-cocaine-pipeline-to-Europe-GI-TOC-InsightCrime.pdf>.

¹² McDermott et al., *The Cocaine Pipeline*, 1.

¹³ McDermott et al., 1.

¹⁴ McDermott et al., 1.

dependency of Russia after the latter's invasion of Ukraine. Furthermore, Europe's desired energy transition requires critical minerals found in South America to push forward technological changes in the reduction of its carbon footprint¹⁵.

Given the increase of cocaine shipments towards Europe and the preference for maritime sea lines of communication, Brussels already expects a surge in the cocaine flow towards Europe. In tacit recognition of this reality, the EU has slowly set in motion initiatives to curb the drug smuggling¹⁶ towards Europe and the cross-border smuggling in MERCOSUR-countries.

A deepening of commercial relations between both continents means that port infrastructure will play a major role for traffickers. Containers, for instance, are a rising priority for law-enforcement authorities. Despite the use of semi-submersibles, a major vulnerability is the existing port infrastructure and the use of containers to smuggle large quantities that cannot be transported through other means. In fact, the current "battle of containers"¹⁷ already suggests a high level of sophistication and the need of criminal networks to prepare shipments in high quantities using already established infrastructure.

At the same time, it highlights the relative ineffectiveness of law-enforcement efforts to curb the trafficking. In other words, a greater volume of trade from South America towards Europe will most certainly bring a dramatic increase of unpunished drug trafficking. However, the EU should deepen the long-lasting efforts to take the market away from criminal organizations. Not the other way around.

Implication 2: Technology and port infrastructure makes the hunt for smugglers even more difficult

With the increase of maritime trade between MERCOSUR and the EU, smugglers will find sophisticated ways to camouflage shipments, exploiting the expected increase of trade, warranting improvements to port infrastructure. Another factor is the advance in technology in the area of semi-submersibles. For the EU, which is heavily invested in maritime interdiction (see next section), technology is a "classic double-edged sword"¹⁸. While the development of their own semi-submersibles may extend the ability of navies and constabulary forces' maritime awareness at a reduced cost,¹⁹ it also increases the ability of traffickers to smuggle large quantities of narcotics, while decreasing the likelihood of detection.

Semi-submersibles possess the ability to navigate barely under the water surface, but are not fully capable of diving. In fact, the vast majority of semi-submersibles are adaptations of go-fast hulls designed to navigate at a slow pace to increase their stealth capability. Notwithstanding, the relatively cheap design and production of semi-submersibles means that states need to deploy anti-submarine technologies to find them. This, however is expensive, requires sophisticated military equipment and can only be performed in certain spaces and at certain times, straining navies' limited capabilities in the vastness of the North and South Atlantic oceans until they catch up technologically. Realistic estimations of the number of vessels sailing remain unknown, increasing the difficulty estimating the success of seizure rates. In 2019, authorities discovered 36 such vessels and estimations suggest that about 200

¹⁵ Mia, Irene "Prospects for the EU-Latin America Strategic Partnership", accessed September 3, 2023, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2023/07/prospects-for-the-eu-latin-america-strategic-partnership/>.

¹⁶ EUROFRONT Programme, "Latin America and Europe are working on a series of recommendations to Make Investigations into Drug Trafficking More Efficient", accessed July 5, 2022, <https://programaeurofront.eu/en/novedad/latinoamerica-y-europa-trabajan-en-una-serie-de-recomendaciones-para-hacer-mas-eficientes-las-investigaciones-contr-el-narcotra>.

¹⁷ McDermott et al., *The Cocaine Pipeline*, 46.

¹⁸ Coito, Joel "Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships: New Possibilities—and Challenges— in Ocean Law and Policy", *International Law Studies*, 97 (2012): 285, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2955&context=ils>.

¹⁹ Coito, "Maritime", 279-285.

may be sailing at any time.²⁰ It is highly likely that interdiction efforts catch just one out of every four semi-submersibles,²¹ highlighting the vessels' presumed high rate of success.

Traffickers' deep pockets and penchant for adapting technology for criminal purposes make plausible the existence of maritime autonomous vehicles (MAVs) crossing the Atlantic²². However, evidence of MAVs silently crossing the Atlantic is scarce and mostly anecdotic. In 2019, Spanish authorities seized for the first time a non-autonomous semi-submersible, which crossed the Atlantic transporting 3,000 kg of cocaine with an estimated wholesale value of up to 90 million Euro.²³ Just two years later, authorities captured a small underwater automatized vessel, built in Spain and originating from Morocco, with a payload of 200 kg.²⁴ Automatized narco-submarines across the Atlantic may be just a matter of time. A most precise observation is that narco-submarine technology developed in South America is also migrating to Europe.

Although earlier work on semi-submersibles has pointed out their potential to smuggle terrorists²⁵ into the continental US, recent literature downplays these fears²⁶ and rather stresses the production of technology required to evade authorities on the one hand and interdict smuggling vessels on the other²⁷. European decision-makers should focus on updating the regulatory framework to deal with smuggling MAVs in international waters. As McLaughlin and Klein point out, central questions involve a redefinition of what a significantly smaller uncrewed "vessel" is in international law. This is supplemented by the need to clearly identify law-enforcement MAVs liable to exercise the rights of maritime law enforcement powers, such as visit and hot pursuit, and ultimately, the amount of force allowed to stop smuggling MAVs as well as the legal framework to remotely pursue the operators of these drones abroad.²⁸

²⁰ "Submarines: Trans-Atlantic Narco-Subs", StrategyPage, last modified March 20, 2020, <https://www.strategypage.com/htmlw/htsub/articles/20200320.aspx>.

²¹ Ramírez, Byron and Bunker, Robert J. "Narco-Submarines: Drug Cartel's Innovative Technology", *CIMSEC*, August 2 2014, <https://cimsec.org/narco-submarines-drug-cartels-innovative-technology/>.

²² Anecdotic evidence of automatized semi-submersibles goes back to Pablo Escobar being the first to employ such devise to transport cocaine to Puerto Rico. See Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo. Die Jagd auf Pablo Escobar, Kolumbiens Drogenbaron* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag), 2001, 53. In 2011, a former Cali-cartel associated trafficker involved in the building of semi-submersibles in the 90's claimed that the "final objective [semi-submersible] technology" was the transport of narcotics "from the ports of the Colombian Caribbean all the way to the coast of Spain [...] from their offices using satellites". Motherboard, "Colombia's Coke-Smuggling Submarines," YouTube video, July 11, 2013, 23:41-24:46, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqYoif-9c64>. By 2010, three Colombians pleaded guilty in US District Court in Tampa, Florida, for the attempted building of "remote-controlled vessels" able to transport a 1,8 kg payload for about 1,000 miles without refueling at a cost of \$500,000 as a part of a conspiracy dating back to 1997. Terrance G. Lichtenwald and Mara H. Steinhour, and Frank s. Perri, "A Maritime Threat Assessment of Sea Based Criminal Organizations and Terrorist Operations", *Homeland Security Affairs* 8, article 13 (August 2012): 12-13, <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/227>.

²³ McDermott et al., *The Cocaine Pipeline*, 3.

²⁴ Cañas, Jesús A "Drones submarinos para el narco 'made in Cádiz'", *El País*, July 4, 2022, <https://elpais.com/espana/2022-07-04/cae-la-banda-que-concibio-drones-submarinos-para-transportar-droga.html>; Andrés Machado, "La Policía interviene seis drones submarinos que se utilizaban para transportar droga," *El Mundo*, July 4, 2022, <https://www.elmundo.es/andalucia/2022/07/04/62c2b5ddfdff8848b456e.html>.

²⁵ Jaramillo, Michelle Jacome "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Development of Narco-Submarines", *Journal of Strategic Security*, no. 1 (2016): 49-51, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.9.1.1509>; John Stryker, "Narcosubmarines: Nexus of Terrorism and Drug Trafficking", *CIMSEC*, January 11, 2018, <http://cimsec.org/narcosubmarines-nexus-terrorism-drug-trafficking/35223>.

²⁶ Rojas-Sánchez, Daniel; Rivera-Páez, Samuel and Afandor, Germán, "Semisubmersibles and Drug Trafficking", in *Maritime Security: Counter-Terrorism Lessons from Maritime Piracy and Narcotics Interdiction*, eds. Edward R. Lucas et al.(n.p.: Springer, 2020), 47-57.

²⁷ Javier Guerrero C., Javier C. *Narcosubmarines: Outlaw Innovation and Maritime Interdiction in the War on Drugs* (Singapore: Palgrave Pivot Singapore, 2019), 1-9.

²⁸ McLaughlin, Rob and Klein, Natalie "Maritime Autonomous Vehicles and Drug Trafficking by Sea: Some Legal Issues", *The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law*, 36, no.3 (June 2021): 138, 10.1163/15718085-bja10061.

Unlike narco-submarines, which are usually built in remote areas isolated from economic hubs, port infrastructure requires close attention as criminal organizations exploit legitimate economic infrastructure to smuggle large quantities of narcotics. There is a reported increase in different smuggling methods²⁹, often without the knowledge of the goods, ship and container owners. Examples are the rip-on, rip-off method, the cloning of container's identifications or the changing the contaminated containers' point of departure or arrival, which makes the "game of hide and seek"³⁰ in container traffic a daunting task for law enforcement authorities.

The vulnerability of port infrastructure poses a risk for Europe, which could lead to an increase of violence in port cities. For instance, current cases of drug-related assassinations in the Netherlands and Germany should make clear, that more violence, although not on the same scale as, for instance in Guayaquil, Ecuador, or Buenaventura, Colombia, is a reasonable possibility for ports that handle most of the European drug trafficking, such as Antwerp, Amsterdam and Rotterdam³¹.

Finally, technology can also allow for drug retail distribution to be performed in discreet ways and for profits to be laundered without raising suspicion. Dutch authorities have targeted encryption technology used by traffickers to seize 10 tons in July 2020.³² Additionally, technology has enabled money-laundering methods, which in conjunction with a generation of low-profile traffickers have converted Europe into a money-laundering hub, especially in countries with no serious intention to reform in sight such as the UK, the Netherlands³³ or Germany (with its long tradition of cash payment). According to the German Federal Criminal Police Office, almost half of all criminal groups deal with drugs in the country and constitute primary actors interested in injecting illegally generated profits into the economy.³⁴

Implication 3: Expect an overreach of security mandates

Although drug smuggling has been without a doubt framed as a threat for international security,³⁵ the EU did not initially deem narcotics as a threat to the Union's survival. Instead, it conceptualizes drug trafficking as a source of violence in the communities in which drug trafficking organizations operate.³⁶ In the eyes of the EU, this is due to two reasons: First, drug trafficking attracts migrants to the EU, who are interested in profiting from the income the drug trade generates, leading to social tensions with host communities. Secondly, the unregulated and highly competitive economic practices of drug trafficking are inherently related to violence. Violence, in turn, generates fear and threatens the social and cultural values of the European Union.

Unlike on land, there is an EU-funded militarized approach to tackle drugs on sea. The focus on interdiction stands out as the European Union has conceived its drug policy on land as an alternative to

²⁹ McDermott et al., *The Cocaine Pipeline*, 36-46; UNODC, *Global Report*, 163-172.

³⁰ McDermott et al., *The Cocaine Pipeline*, 59-60.

³¹ McDermott et al., *The Cocaine Pipeline*, 82.

³² Daly, Max "What the EncroChat Busts Tell Us About Organised Crime in Europe", Vice, accessed September 2, 2023, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ep4b8m/encrochat-europe-organised-crime-busts-cocaine-guns>.

³³ McDermott et al., *The Cocaine Pipeline*, 162-163.

³⁴ n.a., "Organised Crime in Germany: Record Number of Investigations", Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, accessed September 2, 2023, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/EN/2022/09/organised-crime-in-germany.html>.

³⁵ Crick, Emily "Drugs as an Existential Threat: An Analysis of the International Securitization of Drugs", *International Journal of Drug Policy* 23, no. 5 (2012): 413-414, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2012.03.004>.

³⁶ Fukumi, Sayaka *Cocaine Trafficking in Latin America: EU and US Policy Responses* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 49-75.

the traditional "Wars on Drugs" (WoD). In Colombia³⁷ and Bolivia³⁸, the EU has acted as more interested in investing in so-called alternative development projects. These are tied to trade agreements, which include the voluntary eradication of coca crops as opposed to forced eradication through aerial fumigation or manual work - and the creation of livelihoods based on licit agricultural products.

The "EU's toolbox"³⁹ in South America, following their core liberal principles, includes high-level dialogue and exchange of information, and the engagement in development cooperation. In the maritime domain, however, EU capacity-building activities in South America are marked by the strengthening of cooperation in intelligence affairs, departing from the EU's stated goal of a holistic and sustainable development. The first of two instruments is the COPOLAD-funded SEACOP (Seaport Cooperation Project), founded in 2010, which addresses the flow of cocaine on sea from Latin America to West Africa⁴⁰ as part of the Cocaine Route Programme (CRP), which in 2019 was replaced by the Global Illicit Flows Programme (GIFP)⁴¹. SEACOP's original outreach was limited to West African countries (SEACOP I-III). However, the increasing volume of drug shipments from Latin America and the Caribbean towards the region compelled the program to extend its scope of security cooperation. SEACOP V works with nine countries in West Africa⁴², nine in Latin America⁴³ and 13 in the Caribbean⁴⁴. It focuses on supporting the production of maritime and riverine intelligence, the integration of know-how on maritime interdiction into "national and regional curricula"⁴⁵ and the improvement of cooperation and information sharing at national, regional and transnational levels, explicitly including EU agencies such as EUROPOL and FRONTEX⁴⁶. Additionally, on the basis of this network, SEACOP has held transregional meetings of Maritime Intelligence Units (MIUs) to increase the sharing of information, the fostering of cooperation among Latin American and West African countries⁴⁷ and the developing of regional strategy⁴⁸.

The second instrument - which closely cooperates with SEACOP - is the Maritime Analysis and Operation Centre - Narcotics MAOC (N) -, which acts as the EU's intelligence coordination platform in counter-narcotics. Six EU member states and the Internal Security Fund of the European Union stand behind MAOC (N). The center gathers Country Liaison Officers from EU police, customs, military and maritime authorities as well as the US Drug Enforcement Administration and the Joint Interagency Task Force - South (JIATF-S). MAOC (N) is essentially the main center of intelligence fusion in Europe for

³⁷ Laurent, "Colombia y Europa frente a las drogas: desencuentro pero cooperación", in: *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: éxitos, fracasos y extravíos*, eds. Alejandro Gaviria Uribe and Daniel Mejía Londoño (Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, 2011), 191.

³⁸ Fukumi, *Cocaine Trafficking*, 125-129.

³⁹ Selleslaghs, *The EU's Performance*, 535.

⁴⁰ "SEACOP", Global Illicit Flows Programme of the European Union, accessed May 14, 2023, <https://illicitflows.eu/projects/seacop/>.

⁴¹ GIFP encompasses capacity building programmes to increase the surveillance of commercial airport (AIRCOP), civil aviation (COLIBRI), to enhance the effectivity of the criminal justice (CRIMJUST), to combat fire arms trafficking (DISRUPT), and increase the internal coordination of the several projects (MASIF), among others. For a detailed description of GIFP see "Projects," Global Illicit Flows Programme of the European Union, accessed May 14, 2023, <https://illicitflows.eu/projects/>.

⁴² Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, togo, The Gambia, Ivory Coast. See SEACOP, "Our Activities May - June 2022", *Newsletter*, June, 2022, 2, <https://illicitflows.eu/seacop-newsletter-june-2022/>.

⁴³ Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay. See SEACOP, "Our Activities", 2.

⁴⁴ Anguilla, Antigua, Barbados, British Virgina Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago. See SEACOP, "Our Activities", 2.

⁴⁵ SEACOP, "SEACOP: An Introduction", *Newsletter*, February, 2022, 2, <https://illicitflows.eu/seacop-newsletter-february-2022/>.

⁴⁶ "SEACOP".

⁴⁷ SEACOP, "Transregional Cooperation Promoted by SEACOP in 1st Trans-Regional Meeting", *Newsletter*, June, 2022, 8, <https://illicitflows.eu/seacop-newsletter-june-2022/>.

⁴⁸ SEACOP, "Ecuador hosts Major SEACOP International Seminar", *Newsletter*, December, 2022, 9, <https://illicitflows.eu/seacop-newsletter-december-2022/>.

countering drugs. Similar to the “Hub-and-Spoke-model”⁴⁹ used by JIATF-S and the Sea Agreement with regional partners in Central and South America, the European Union benefits from the combined work of SEACOP’s established regional MIUs (the spokes). These provide actionable intelligence data (through bilaterally signed memoranda of understanding) to MAOC (N) (the hub), which in turn leads to more efficient maritime interdiction in the Caribbean, usually implemented by regional navies or constabularies maritime forces⁵⁰.

However, the trend towards interdiction on sea by intelligence and naval forces, as opposed to voluntary eradication and long-term projects involving a plethora of state and non-state actors, is problematic for several reasons. First, it mixes a developmental approach with security tools as already known in EU’s foreign policy⁵¹, leading to the use of development-funding for military purposes. Second, EU policy relies on capacity building to strengthen third countries to fight drug trafficking and terrorism “by proxy”⁵². This, in turn, leads to problems in accountability and leaves the question open of how aid and capacity building are employed by local militaries. Finally, there is an attempt to link drug trafficking with environmental issues^{53 54} and thus, to expand the counter narcotic mandate to the curbing of non-state sanctioned extraction of timber and gold, which again, suggests a securitizing move of complex regional phenomena, moving EU policy away from traditional developmental solutions. These are some of the issues which will come back to the EU in the near future as the attempt to stop illegal economies will keep find ways to thrive.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the implications of drug trafficking in South America for European drug policy. It identifies three areas of relevance for the EU, which should be addressed: the increase of illegal flows from South America to Europe, the boost technology provides to traffickers and the challenges in incorporating maritime autonomous vessels into our forces. Finally, it points out the risk of increasing mandates and the over-reliance on militarized instruments to identify and interdict maritime traffic. Given the threats in the maritime domain, the measures taken by EU security agencies deviate from the traditional developmental approaches in the region. Initiatives such as SEACOP and MAOC (N) are in line with the need for the EU to tackle the supply side of drug trafficking from South America, however, they entail the risk of alienating democratically committed South American partners interested in non-repressive approaches to deal with drug trafficking.

⁴⁹ Davenport, Aaron C. “Lessons from Maritime Narcotics Interdiction: Interdiction in the Maritime Source, Transit, and Arrival Zones of the Western Hemisphere”, in *Maritime Security: Counter-Terrorism Lessons from Maritime Piracy and Narcotics Interdiction*, eds. Edward R. Lucas et al. (n.p: Springer, 2020), 17-18.

⁵⁰ The European Union is also stakeholder in regional security networks such as the Regional Security System (RSS) on the eastern Caribbean and CARICOM IMPACS and in multilateral organizations such as the UNODC through the Container Control Program. For an overview of EU cooperation in the Caribbean, [see \[66\]](#).

⁵¹ Saltnes, Johanne Døhlle “The European Union and Global Development: A Rights-Based Development Policy?”, in *The EU’s Development Policy Post-2020 Continuity or Change?* (London: Routledge, 2022), 51–76.

⁵² Stambøl, Eva Magdalena “EU Initiatives along the ‘Cocaine Routes’ to Europe: Fighting Drug Trafficking and Terrorism by Proxy?”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 2 (March 3, 2016): 318, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2016.1151534>.

⁵³ Dupire, Camille “Towards SEACOP VI: Uniting Caribbean and Latin American Nations Against Maritime Trafficking,” *Global Illicit Flows Programme of the European Union*, October 27, 2023, <https://illicitflows.eu/towards-seacop-vi-uniting-caribbean-and-latin-american-nations-against-maritime-trafficking/>.

⁵⁴ Henriksen et al., *Maritime Threat Assessment of Illicit Flows Across the Atlantic* (Brussels: Masif and SEACOP, 2022), 7, <https://illicitflows.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Maritime-threat-assessment-of-illicit-flows-across-the-Atlantic-FINAL-DRAFT.pdf>.

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Understanding South America! – Spotlights on the Maritime Dimension and Inheiring Problems, Reflections on Maritime Strategy Issues and Relevance for Security Policy Action

André Pecher & Dr. Carl Johan Blydal

So why should Europe care? *[Still in progress, waiting for final chapter]*

Anne Runhaar

While this book explores the history, present and future of South American maritime security, the dangers and strategy, it still leaves the questions untouched, why other nations, especially those of Europe, should make an effort to help and why it could be beneficial. This chapter aims to give an insight and highlight positions of the authors.

Throughout the book, there are three main challenges – Drugs, fishing and piracy – identified, which affect maritime security and influence maritime strategy in South America and that also extend to Europe directly or indirectly. As mentioned by Rafael Uribe Neira (Chapter XX), drugs, from cannabis to cocaine, flow directly from South America to Europe. 89% of all European seized drug shipments originated from South America and the Caribbean in 2019.⁴¹¹ The fight against drug-related crime in Europe cannot be achieved if these supply chains are not blocked and the causes are tackled, making thorough international cooperation necessary.

Piracy poses a significant threat to maritime trade routes, impacting not only the economy of South American nations, but the global economy and therefore Europe's. Especially when it is considered that this region is European Union's fifth largest trading partner, with the trade i.e. between MERCUSOR and the EU amounting to a worth of 118.9 billion euros in 2022.⁴¹² Moreover Europe's reliance on goods such as metal, soil and timber from South America underscores the importance of the issue for Europe. Especially Samuel Rivera Paez (chapter XX) emphasised on the piracy in the region with a special focus on Venezuela and Ecuador and the increasing piracy with speedboats and at gunpoint, which was, until a few years ago, only seen in other parts of the world.

Lastly, IUU Fishing depletes the fish stock, endangers all maritime species through fishing and risks the overall maritime sustainability. Whereas this could be reason enough for other nations to act, seeing that the maritime ecosystem is an interconnected worldwide domain, changes in the marine ecosystem will also affect Europe. Several Latin American countries like Mexico are highly dependent on the sea, which is highlighted by Christian Ehrlich (chapter XX). Without a stable maritime domain and therefore a healthy blue economy, the aspects of insufficient food supply and job loss for the rural maritime industry becomes imminent, leaving the question open, if people would resort to other means like also seen in some African countries. This also leads to an overall assessment that an unstable maritime domain and insufficient maritime security, leads to a certain degree of instability in these countries, which Europe cannot afford especially considering the economic aspects.

China already recognized the importance of South American countries and invests heavily in them, securing them firsthand access to resources, elaborated by Ralph Espach (chapter XX), a geopolitical location for a space station and sometimes also long-lasting dependence of these countries through debt. This not only secures economic prospects, it also could lead to a political backup from these countries, in international political questions like the recognition of Taiwan. The influence on nations in South America generally opens up the possibility to impact predominantly Western-built systems, such as the United Nations. With 33 votes in total and impacts already evident like the obtaining of some countries in the Ukrainian war vote, Europe can simply not afford to lose its influence and relations to these nations, being it for the mentioned economic reasons or the political future in the international system.

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⁴¹² Griger, Gisela (2023): EU trade with Latin America and the Caribbean, In: European Parliament, Accessed under [EU trade with Latin America and the Caribbean \(europa.eu\)](https://euparl.europa.eu/media/default/press/press.do?lang=en&id=123456789), 10.11.2024.

While there should be an international interest to support these countries through the above mentioned reason, these nations have an inherent interest to solve the above mentioned problems by themselves. This requires the modernization of their navies and therefore creates an interesting opportunity internationally. Although Wilder Alejandro Sanchez (chapter XX) already highlighted the preference to homebuilt vessels, there is still a need to cooperate internationally to acquire technologies and already ongoing cooperation with DAMEN and TKMS mentioned as well. Hence, with time there could be more chances for European-south American partnership in the maritime industry.

Delving more into the partnership aspect, South American nations especially Argentina will play a pivotal role in the future of Antarctica, see chapter Leonardo Faria Mattos and Gabriella Paulucci da Hora Viana (chapter XX). While several nations including two European nations and the US claim parts of Antarctica, increasing cooperation will ensure stabilisation and continuing demilitarisation in the icy region. A deepened Argentinian - EU cooperation could also advance policy interests like access to maritime resources within Antarctica, especially considering the profound basis with the EU being the second largest trading partner after China for Argentina. However, it is not just a question of policy-making, but rather the interest and necessity from a European Union perspective for cooperation to keep Antarctica conflict-free, demilitarised and denuclearized, abiding by the legal treaties, not even excluding the possibility of defending the international regulatory framework.⁴¹³

Another recent political shift should also prepare Europe for the possibility that the US will either intensify cooperation within South America, as already seen through investments during the 2016 presidential era, or abandon it in favour of military cooperation and a complete shift to America First. The latter is unlikely, given the geographical proximity of Latin America and the US. If it does, Europe, and the European Union in particular, must be prepared to step in, otherwise countries such as China will do so, with potentially disastrous consequences for access to resources.

This all should be reasons enough for European nations to act and deepen their interest into the region. While this book shows the possibility and challenges it is important to highlight the given South American perspective on their continent. As part of a whole series, called “American Series”, within the Kiel Seapower Series, many maritime experts from the region and abroad came together, to discuss the future of the maritime domain within and around the South American continent. This included not only chance to national perspectives, but also to personal assessments. Whereas above highlights why European nations should care, the authors of every chapter give multiple reasons and explanations why one should be interested in the continent and follow the developments of the continent closely – being it from within South America or externally.

⁴¹³ Dodds, Klaus; Raspotnik, Andreas: In-Depth Analysis Antarctica: What role for the European Union?, European Parliament, Accessed under: [Title of Study](#), 10.11.2024.

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