

Maritime Regional Security Governance in the Atlantic: Antagonisms, Overlaps and Cooperation

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Abstract

The Atlantic Basin is a strategic economic and security space, governed by a complex regional architecture composed of multiple organisations and initiatives. This article examines the relationships between the main regional governance structures in the field of maritime security, and identifies two patterns among them. The first pattern is a divisive rivalry between North and South Atlantic, which materialises in the politicised antagonism between the mutually exclusive North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Zone of Peace and Security of the South Atlantic as well as a competitive overlap between the Organisation of American States and the Union of South American Nations. The second pattern is cooperative interregionalism

where overlapping organisations and initiatives are able to complement each other due to a functional approach. However, interregional cooperation cannot compensate for institutional shortcomings that impede a sustained and effective coordination of maritime security efforts in the broader Atlantic basin.

Keywords: South Atlantic; Maritime Governance; Regional Security; Overlapping Regionalism.

Resumo

A Governança da Segurança Marítima Regional na Bacia do Atlântico: Antagonismos, Sobreposições e Cooperação

A Bacia do Atlântico é um espaço estratégico em termos económicos e de segurança, governado por uma complexa arquitetura regional composta por diversas organizações e iniciativas. Este artigo examina as relações entre as principais estruturas de governança no âmbito da segurança marítima, sendo identificados dois padrões de relacionamento entre elas. O primeiro padrão é uma rivalidade divisória entre o Atlântico Norte e o Atlântico Sul. Esse padrão materializa-se no antagonismo politizado, identificado entre as partes mutuamente exclusivas: Organização do Atlântico Norte e a Zona de Paz e Segurança do Atlântico Sul; e tam-

bém na sobreposição competitiva entre a Organização de Estados Americanos e a União de Nações Sul-Americanas. O segundo padrão é o inter-regionalismo cooperativo, no qual organizações e iniciativas sobrepostas são capazes de se complementarem a partir de uma abordagem funcional. No entanto, a cooperação inter-regional não compensa deficiências institucionais, que impedem uma coordenação efetiva e sustentável de esforços em segurança marítima na extensão da bacia Atlântica.

Palavras-chave: Atlântico Sul; Segurança Marítima; Segurança Regional; Regionalismo sobreposto.

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Introduction

The South Atlantic Ocean is one of the central maritime regions in the world, with several important traffic lanes passing through the region and the existence of strategic resources. As such, countries in the region have invested in regional security mechanisms put in place to ensure the safety of maritime interactions. Security issues in the South Atlantic are wide ranging. First, some parts of the South Atlantic are a hotspot for maritime piracy, with the waters off the coasts of West Africa particularly vulnerable. The International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre (2022) has documented numerous attacks in the region, including hijackings and kidnappings of crew members. Second, the South Atlantic is a major transit route for trafficking in drugs, arms, and people. Criminal organisations use the region as a corridor to smuggle goods between Europe, Africa, and South America (The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2018). Third, overfishing is a major concern for the South Atlantic. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing operations have depleted fish stocks and caused environmental damage (Seminario 2021). Fourth, terrorist groups have a presence in the region and have been known to target ships and oil platforms, as well as strategic infrastructure (Marinha do Brasil, 2020). Fifth, the South Atlantic has become a dumping ground for hazardous waste, including oil and chemical pollutants. This has resulted in significant environmental damage and has had a negative impact on marine life (United Nations Environment Programme, 2017).

Regional maritime security governance is therefore essential for the South Atlantic. By creating governance mechanisms, countries can share information, coordinate responses to incidents, and prevent and detect crime in the region's waters. Regional cooperation also allows for the development of joint strategies to respond to threats such as piracy and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

Conceptual/Theoretical discussions

Regional maritime security governance is a concept that refers to the coordination of security efforts among nations in a given region. It is a complex and dynamic process that requires cooperation among states in the region in order to address common maritime security threats. The objective of regional maritime security governance is to ensure the safety and security of the maritime domain, thereby facilitating the freedom of navigation, commercial activities, and the sustainable use of marine resources. Regional maritime security governance is composed of a number of different measures, including the establishment of a regional maritime security strategy, the development of a maritime security architecture, and

the implementation of maritime security measures in the region (Boşilcă et al. 2022).

The strategy is the foundation of the governance structure, as it outlines the goals of the region and the measures that will be taken to achieve them. The architecture is the framework through which the strategy is implemented, as it outlines the various mechanisms and tools that will be used to achieve the desired objectives. Finally, the measures are the actual implementation of the strategy and architecture, which involves the coordination of activities among regional partners and the implementation of specific measures such as surveillance, search and rescue operations, and other activities related to maritime security. In order to be effective, regional maritime security governance requires a high level of cooperation and coordination among states in the region. This requires that states in the region work together to address common concerns and develop a unified approach to maritime security. However, the delineation of maritime spaces can be done according to multiple logics, such as geology, law, ecology and ideology. Accordingly, delineations overlap and result in either competition between distinct regional formats, or cooperation between complementary and mutually reinforcing governance mechanisms.

The Atlantic Ocean as a whole and even the South Atlantic can be divided into numerous sub-regions depending on the dominant applied perspective and narrative. The Atlantic therefore encompasses diverse region-building dynamics dealing with maritime space. In both theory and practice, regions are typically conceived as territorialised spaces with a physical terra-centric coherence. When regions are delineated, oceans constitute the borders of regions rather than binding entities or even regions in their own right. There are important conceptual implications of oceans as regions, because the latter tend to be associated with territoriality and physical coherence. This terra-centric approach is particularly prevalent where the continental visions remain dominant paradigms, such as in Africa and Latin America. Pan-Africanism and Bolivarism constitute recurrent ideological and cultural reference points for political and societal life on the respective continents. Nevertheless, regions are not necessarily confined to continental shelves and there are several conceptions that challenge these topographic divides, be they historic regions, such as the Mediterranean, or current reference frameworks, such as the Indo-Pacific. Riparian countries and non-state actors are able to appropriate these maritime spaces for their own identity, for the political sphere of influence or for economic ambitions.

The challenge of delineating regions around maritime spaces is also present in regional organisations which predominantly represent amalgamations of nation-states and focus on land-based issues. Yet, there are exceptions, and some regionalisms directly challenge the dominant topographic categories of maritime spaces

as dividers. Maritime spaces like the Atlantic Ocean may not be permanently inhabited but they constitute a social, political and economic space that has evolved over time and continues to be actively appropriated. Riparian countries are projecting their ambitions into this maritime space, from commercial interests embedded in blue economy plans to perceptions of maritime security threats.

As even land-based regional organisations increasingly position themselves as maritime regionalisms, frictions between parallel efforts to create regional communities become tangible. Some regional initiatives include a vast number of countries and serve as negotiation space between regional powers such as South Africa and Brazil. Others only comprise a limited number of members based on narrow criteria, such as a colonial legacy in the case of the Community of the Portuguese Speaking Community (CPLP) or specific functional security concerns as in the case of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GCC). As land-based regionalisms lay governance claims beyond their shores while maritime regionalisms seek to encompass transregional spaces, frictions between increasingly overlapping regionalisms become tangible.

The remainder of this article analyses the main delineations of regional maritime security governance in the Atlantic basin in order to identify both antagonisms and complementarities between regional organisations. Relevant regionalisms have an explicit Atlantic component or at least project themselves into this maritime space. In order to advance the typologisation of regionalism, the analysis distinguishes between two simultaneously occurring but opposing dynamics that characterise the relationship between regionalisms: antagonism and integration. The North-South divide is the most visible form of antagonism, best illustrated in the relationship between ZOPACAS and NATO. Antagonism is less pronounced between overlapping regionalisms, due to some member states belonging to several organisations, but competition can nonetheless arise (Nolte, 2013). For instance, the maritime outreach of the Pan-American Organisation of American States (OAS) stands in a competitive relationship with South American initiatives such as OECS, UNASUR, AMAS and ZICOSUR, which in turn form a loose complex of integrative regionalism characterised by compatibility and cooperation. On the African side, the AU and its relevant RECs (SADC, ECCAS and ECOWAS), as well as the GCC and CEMAC are all engaging in maritime governance policies with numerous overlaps. In addition, there are numerous forms of regional cooperation that are driven by external involvement, from punctual military exercises to more institutionalised arrangements, in particular with France and the USA. The article proceeds by discussing the consequences of South Atlantic maritime regionalisms defining their delineation and exclusivity.

The North-South Divide

NATO-ZOPACAS

From a geopolitical and economic point of view, a major juncture runs between North and South, even if this division has blurry boundaries that occasionally shift. Politically speaking the North Atlantic is not only a topographical category but also corresponds to a space encapsulated by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It is a space which can be set apart from the South Atlantic on the basis of socio-economic as well as security and geopolitical criteria. NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance between the United States, Canada, and several European states. It was established in 1949 for the purpose of collective defence in Europe and the North Atlantic region. NATO is responsible for a range of security activities in the region, including maritime surveillance and counter-piracy operations. It is also responsible for the coordination of maritime search and rescue operations.

By contrast, the South Atlantic is less determined by alliances and contains very diverse societies, whose commercial and societal connections are relatively limited in spite of the far-reaching history of slave trade. On an ideational level, the South Atlantic is bound together by common notions regarding their position in the world economy and regarding demilitarisation, which set it apart from the North Atlantic, as the geographical perspectives coincide with the sociological perspectives of Global North and Global South. The South Atlantic is primarily composed of countries that liberated themselves from colonisation and have undergone successive political and/or economic crises in past decades, including the major countries Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria and South Africa. While the securitisation in the North is represented by NATO, a long-standing institutionalised and binding organisation, the South Atlantic has struggled to consolidate its security arrangements. Several organisations claim to promote peace and security in the Southern region. For example, while the American continent has the Organisation of American States (OAS), the South Atlantic States among them (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay) are also part of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation for the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS) together with African riparian states. Before the creation of the ZOPACAS in 1986, there had been failed attempts in the 1970s to create an South Atlantic Treaty Organisation (SATO) that would be complementary and even allied to NATO, thus bridging between North and South. The underlying idea was to support an alliance between countries that would be willing and able to curb the influence of the Soviet Union and communist ideas more generally within the South Atlantic. The main members would be the Apartheid government of South Africa and its colony Namibia as well as military governments in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. However, despite some

ideological affinity given the authoritarian nature of all participants at the time as well as sponsorship by the US, the South American states found it difficult to fully align with the a pariah state (Viegas Filho, 2016; Kornegay, 2013).

Consequently, a North-South divide persisted in the Atlantic and became institutionalised in the 1980s. With the re-democratisation wave in South America, the cooperation in the region also gained momentum with the creation of ZOPACAS in 1986 at the United Nations General Assembly. ZOPACAS was almost an antithesis of the original SATO initiative, as its non-militarisation norm was mainly directed against the North Atlantic, causing the United States to vote against the UNGA resolution while several other members of NATO abstained from voting (Souza, Peres, 2013).

After a dormant phase after the end of the Cold War, ZOPACAS has been occasionally revived to foster South-South cooperation and for Brazil to appropriate the South Atlantic as an extension of its territory (Abdenur et al., 2016). The last revitalization of ZOPACAS was in 2021 with the Brazilian Navy organising a symposium along the priorities of its Strategic Plan as an attempt to lead the way in encouraging the coordination of priorities for the region (Marinha do Brasil, 2020). On the African side, engagement with maritime regionalism has been very selective and largely confined to a response to security threats, in particular with the creation of the Gulf of Guinea Commission that is designed to tackle issues of piracy and offshore energy resources in collaboration with the existing external military presence. Apart from these specific issues, which occasionally extend to drug trafficking, fisheries and transport, a strategic approach to the Atlantic is lacking in Africa. Government policies and citizen identities remain dominated by a terra-centric paradigm.

The objectives of ZOPACAS cover several policy fields but are grounded in the promotion of non-intervention, demilitarisation and non-proliferation. The organisation does not have a permanent administration and is frequently dormant but activities can be initiated on an ad-hoc basis, when political will surfaces, as it occurred with the Luanda Action Plan (2007) and the Montevideo Action Plan (2013). The action plans tackle four thematic groups: economic cooperation; crime prevention; peace, stability, and security; scientific research; and environment (United Nations, 2007). Despite a lack of institutionalisation or regular meetings (the last ministerial summit dates back to 2013), technical cooperation and capacity-building agreements have become frequent between its member states. For instance, the naval cooperation agreements that Brazil has pursued with various African countries, such as Namibia, Benin and Angola, refer to ZOPACAS as a framework for the overall objectives to be achieved (Souza; Peres, 2013). Such activities linked to ZOPACAS therefore have an integrative dimension as they seek to promote security and commercial entanglements within the South Atlantic. However, much of the rationale of ZOPACAS is not linked to functional demand

for integration, but is oriented externally. It embodies the reassertion of control of the South Atlantic region by countries of the South as opposed to the North.

OAS/UNASUR

A second North-South antagonism exists between the Organisation of American States (OAS) and South American regionalisms, in particular the Union of South American States (UNASUR). The OAS and UNASUR are regional organisations that overlap in membership. The OAS is a broad-based organisation that includes all 35 independent states of the Americas. By contrast, UNASUR is restricted to the 12 countries of South America. Another key difference between the OAS and UNASUR is the nature and depth of their activities. The OAS is a multi-purpose organisation that has engaged in a wide range of activities for over 70 years, including political dialogue, economic cooperation, and social and cultural exchange. The OAS also has long-standing ties to other international organisations, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization (Aksoy and Robins, 2000). UNASUR is more narrowly-focused in terms of policy areas and has sought to develop its own institutions and mechanisms for regional cooperation, and has often taken a more critical stance towards the existing international order (Moreno, 2005).

Both the OAS and UNASUR are active in the area of maritime security, especially in the promotion of regional cooperation and coordination. UNASUR has established a number of mechanisms and institutions to facilitate collaboration among its member states on maritime security issues, such as the South American Defense Council (SADC) and the South American Naval Force (FSNA). Through these institutions, UNASUR has sought to foster greater cooperation and coordination among its member states on issues such as maritime surveillance, search and rescue, and disaster response. Another key aspect of UNASUR's work on maritime security is the development of regional policies and standards. The organisation has played a leading role in promoting the adoption of common approaches and standards on maritime security issues among its member states. For example, UNASUR has worked to develop regional guidelines on issues such as maritime traffic management, maritime safety, and the protection of marine resources. Through these efforts, UNASUR has sought to promote greater consistency and coherence in the maritime security policies of its member states (Duarte and Kenkel, 2019).

Several OAS regulations also deal with maritime security and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, among them the Cooperation for the Prevention of Maritime Disputes between Member States of the Caribbean region, which was approved in 2002 (OAS, 2002; Carneiro, 2016). However, the institution didn't assume the role of mediator in the recurrent disputes between Colombia and Venezuela. Even if the

tensions between the United States and Venezuela (under Hugo Chavez and afterwards Nicolás Maduro) can serve as an explanation for the inaction of the OAS, organisations without US membership, such as UNASUR, have not acted as mediators either. Despite having created a Defense Council, UNASUR did not foresee specific norms for maritime security (Carneiro, 2016). The institutional designs and membership criteria outlined by the lines traced in the AMAS¹, where the Caribbean would be under the responsibility of the US government, have created an impasse for the mediation of conflicts on the Venezuelan shore and might be one of the reasons for UNASUR not to act. Geographically listed as a part of “maritime security in the north”, leaves little space for mediation being more politically connected with South American countries seeing the Caribbean as a disputed area tied to the US. The creation of the Defense Council itself was cited as one of the possible justifications by the Brazilian government for the reactivation of the US Fourth Fleet in the region, together with the discovery of the pre-salt and the extraction and oil trade routes in Venezuela. The reactivation, without prior notice, was perceived negatively by most South American governments, who are generally opposed to permanent military US presence and the possibility of external interventions (Souza, 2017).

A second antagonistic element that is recurrent in the political agenda of all regional institutions in Latin America with great stability over time is the Falklands/Malvinas issue. It is not only present in regional organisations with sectors focused on maritime security, but is discussed in all regional organisations, such as Mercosur, UNASUR, Grupo de Río and other high-level summits. South American states use regional organisations to express support to Argentina against the UK, for instance by declaring that British ships with flags of the Falklands would not be accepted in any of the countries (Library of Congress, 2011).

Integrative Regionalism

Overlapping cooperation

While the political and ideological divisions between North and South Atlantic remain substantial, regional governance mechanisms cooperate more easily within

1 The Maritime Area of South Atlantic, created in 1996, is a product of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance. It establishes that integrated defence is divided into three areas: the Caribbean (United States responsibility), the area between the coast of Brazil and the Central and West African coast (United States responsibility in conjunction with Brazil), and the area between the Rio de la Plata and the coast of Southern Africa (Argentina’s and South Africa’s responsibility) (Maritime Area of the South Atlantic, 1996).

the South Atlantic. In the field of maritime security transversal cooperation occurs in various functional technical areas, for instance around infrastructure, science and technology projects. Functional cooperation refers to the collaboration between states or other international actors in specific policy areas or issues, requiring less involvement by political leadership and less ideological convergence. Functional cooperation can be pursued incrementally and selectively, allowing states to cooperate in specific policy areas and then potentially expand their cooperation to other areas as trust and cooperation develop. This incremental approach allows states to cooperate on issues of common concern without committing to a full-fledged political integration process. Political integration often involves the adoption of regulations with strong normative contents, which can be difficult to negotiate and implement, especially if there are such significant differences in the political, economic, and cultural systems of the participating states, as in the Atlantic basin.

In the area of infrastructure, ZICOSUR, a regional integration initiative by subnational actors, that stands for the Central South American Zone of Integration is a regional organisation that aims to promote maritime economy, competitiveness and development, with institutions that have been designed to deal specifically with economic integration and cooperation among the countries of South America. ZICOSUR has been responsible for negotiating rounds for funding of the Biocean corridor, building infrastructure connections between Atlantic and Pacific, a long-time demand of landlocked countries, especially in remote areas. Similar initiatives for maritime transport can be found in South America (Medeiros and Moreira, 2017) and in Central America (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana, 2022). This can be seen as a reaction to the RSS Maritime Security Strategy Project (Regional Security System), launched in 2021 by the OAS in coordination with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). The RSS project includes a strategic plan for the region as well as individual plans for the member states (Organization of American States, 2021). However, this cut-off still complies with AMAS. Another relevant initiative is SABIA-Mar (*Satélites Argentino-Brasileño para Información Ambiental del Mar*), a joint initiative by the governments of Brazil and Argentina to send two satellites for maritime scanning (one focused on global oceans and another one in regional oceans), each country being responsible for one of the satellites. The Argentinian is scheduled to fly in 2023, while the Brazilian hasn't been scheduled as of yet. In the same vein, SisGAAz (Management System of the Blue Amazon), coordinated by the Brazilian navy, includes monitoring of the coast through a transnational network of terrestrial and marine sensors for coastal vigilance and protection (Gobierno de Argentina, 2022).

The African side of the South Atlantic also exhibits a high density of regional governance with several overlapping but cooperating organisations promoting

similar strategies and goals. Initiatives on maritime security are often born within already existing regional economic communities (RECs). Adding further to this complexity, maritime security issues cut across the North-South divide. For instance, piracy, armed robbery, kidnapping and illicit traffic in the Gulf of Guinea do not only pose challenges to the states of the region, but are perceived as risks for the entire Atlantic region, making exclusive organisations less pertinent for African states to tackle these challenges. This is due to the interconnectedness of oil exploitation and exportation from the Gulf of Guinea and the transcending nature of armed groupings beyond the South Atlantic.

The first initiative to tackle maritime security was taken by ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States), with a Protocol on the Strategy to Secure Vital Interests at Sea, signed in 2009 (ECCAS, 2009). It includes the division of the area in three tiers to share information, joint patrols and legal harmonisation. The *Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)* joined ECCAS efforts with the signing of Yaoundé Code of Conduct in 2013 to tackle piracy, armed robbery, maritime crimes and terrorism as well as other illicit activities. This implied the creation of intraregional efforts, as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct was created and signed alongside a memorandum of understanding between three regional initiatives: ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) which was created in 2001 specifically to deal with regional maritime security. As a consequence, the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC), a structure based on information sharing from the coast of Senegal to Angola, has been created. Efforts by the African Union (AU) took the matter from regional scope to a Pan-African objective in 2015, The 2050 AU Integrated Maritime Strategy, with the goal of creating a thriving blue economy by aligning economic potential to the security of the region. During one of its extraordinary meetings, in an effort to turn the Yaoundé Protocol into a binding document, a new document was created, the Lomé Charter. The Lomé Charter affirmed the commitments to legal harmonisation within the United Nations system (UNCLOS), cooperation to deal with criminal activity, and development of maritime security of the region. Despite showing unity, common goals, and a joint plan to cooperate in order to ensure local security and economic maritime development, concrete outcomes are still scarce due to a slow pace of ratification and a lack of national legislation regarding maritime crimes. In addition to AU sponsored cooperation, transregional initiatives are promoted by international actors, such by the IMO (International Maritime Organisation), by way of a memorandum of understanding called Sub-regional Coastguard Network for the West and Central African sub-region (ICGN) focusing on maritime security and protection, signed in 2008 alongside the Maritime Organization for West and Central Africa (MOWCA) (African Maritime Safety and Security Agency, 2008).

Conclusions

Antagonisms in maritime security governance are particularly pronounced in politicised organisations. In the Atlantic space, NATO embodies a combination of socio-economic and geopolitical criteria that spans over the North Atlantic. Meanwhile, ZOPACAS defines its identity in opposite ways, not only geographically, as it covers the South Atlantic, but also in terms of how it considers itself to be marginalised in the global economic and security order and in terms of norms such as demilitarisation and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Likewise, the now defunct Defence Council of the Union of South American States (UNASUR) was conceived as an alternative regional security provider to the US-led OAS. Consequently, the membership of ZOPACAS/UNASUR and NATO does not overlap, as their identities are mutually exclusive. However, frictions emerge at the fringes and where overlaps exist due to long-standing commitments being maintained along new initiatives, as between OAS and UNASUR. Under the Regional Security System of the Organisation of American States, the leading NATO member, the US, has responsibility for maritime security of the North Atlantic shores, including the Caribbean. Meanwhile, the leading ZOPACAS member, Brazil is sharing responsibility for the adjacent maritime space up until the Rio de la Plata. The dividing line poses a challenge when conflict needs to be solved along it. The maritime dispute between Venezuela and Colombia is a case in point, where the RSS has not been able to be effective, but also the reactivation of the US 4th Fleet without prior consultation of South American governments has contributed to the division. Other antagonisms between North and South Atlantic include the Falklands/Malvinas conflict between the UK and Argentina, which in particular in South America considered a regional issue, with regular even if performative solidarity in all regional institutions. In the Indian Ocean, postcolonial antagonisms are also pronounced, for instance between the Indian Ocean Commission which is dominated by France and sits uneasily with the African Union and SADC in terms of providing regional security in the Southwest Indian Ocean. By contrast and despite overlaps, cooperation between regional organisations is pronounced within the South Atlantic space, notably in functional areas where the ideological politicisation is less visible, be it infrastructure, science cooperation or information technology. In concrete policy areas where a problem-solving approach is pursued, functional cooperation works across ideological lines, be it coastguard networks or shared sea satellites. In sum, antagonisms between North and South Atlantic regionalisms pose obstacles when it comes to transnational security challenges that occur in areas that are covered by competing regional projects, but they also galvanise cooperation across institutional lines within the South Atlantic.

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