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Geostrategic Visions on the South Atlantic: Brazil and Colombia, a Comparative Approach¹

Visiones geoestratégicas del Atlántico Sur: Brasil y Colombia, un enfoque comparativo

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to analyze the different approaches that Brazil and Colombia have had to date on the geostrategic importance of the South Atlantic, emphasizing the differences that the ocean has had for their respective conceptions of nation and their insertion in the South American region. It argues and concludes that while Brazil seeks leadership in South America by emphasizing its role as promoter of an integral autonomizing² conception that articulates development, defense and regional security, Colombia prioritizes its role as a reference in the fight against transnational crime, positioning itself as a Middle Oceanic Power.

Keywords: South Atlantic, Brazil; Colombia; Grand Strategy; strategic environment

RESUMEN

Este artículo busca analizar los diferentes enfoques que Brasil y Colombia han tenido hasta la fecha sobre la importancia geoestratégica del Atlántico Sur, destacando las diferencias que ha tenido el océano para su respectiva concepción del país y su inserción en la región de América del Sur. Se argumenta y concluye que mientras Brasil busca el liderazgo en esta zona a través de un énfasis en su papel como promotor de una concepción autónoma integral para el Atlántico Sur que articula el desarrollo, la defensa y la seguridad regional, Colombia a su vez prioriza su papel en la región como referencia en la lucha contra la delincuencia transnacional, posicionándose como una potencia oceánica media.

Palabras clave: Atlántico sur, Brasil; Colombia; Gran estrategia; entorno estratégico.

¹ Article prepared within the framework of a research project on Latin American geopolitics at the Center for Research and Special Projects (Externado University of Colombia). The fragments in a language other than English were translated, except for those contained in the explanatory citations.

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² A process that seeks autonomy, but is not yet completed.

Introduction

This article aims to analyze in a comparative approach the conception that Brazil and Colombia have of their Atlantic maritime spaces. It studies how the two nations take into account their strategic environment³ to better position themselves in South America, as well as to contribute to the development of their nation internally. In order to investigate how Brazil and Colombia have strategically defined the South Atlantic, three key variables were selected: security, defense and regional development. This facilitates finding out to what extent these nations seek, or sought, to position themselves as bridge countries between the South and the North.

The author's starting assumption is that Brazil and Colombia developed different strategic conceptualizations from the 20th century to the present on the importance of the South Atlantic. While Brazil's leadership in South America was seen as significant, through its role as promoter of an integral autonomous conceptualization for the South Atlantic, Colombia in turn has seen its role in the region, mainly as a reference in the fight against transnational crime, positioning itself as a Middle Oceanic Power. The two nations seek to project themselves as guarantors of stability in South America regarding maritime issues, but Brazil has gone further with the aim of consolidating an autonomous regional space with respect to extra-regional powers. Due to recent elections for president both in Brazil and Colombia, which hinder a thorough analysis of the subject by 2019, our analysis will only go until the end of 2018.

The main objective of this paper will be, based on the three key variables mentioned above, to pinpoint the main differences between these conceptualizations, in order to evaluate how each country is positioning itself in the region regarding maritime issues. For this purpose, it shall use primary and secondary sources, and semi-structured interviews. A hypothetical deductive methodology will be applied to a comparative approach.

Until the end of the 17th century, Brazil, then part of the Portuguese Empire, was limited to a strip of colonized territories near the Atlantic. Gradually it expanded to the interior, greatly exceeding the line demarcated by the Treaty of Tordesillas.⁴ However, the sea later impacted its development as a nation, until now. As scholar Penna Filho stresses, the country is "much more dedicated to the sea than to the interior" (2015, p. 150). In the late 18th century, tropical crops such as sugar or cocoa accounted for 50% of Brazil's exports and the

³ Zhang *et. al* (2018, p. 15) state that in order to study the international strategic environment three dimensions have to be taken into account: peace, development and governance. They argue that "Not only the elemental characteristics of material, conceptual and institutional factors, but also the characteristics of the relationships related to actor's strategies are all covered by these dimensions."

⁴ The Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494 between Portugal and Spain, established the spaces divided between the two kingdoms in the Atlantic and the so-called New World, in order to avoid confrontations.

lords of the sugar mills began to assert their social status in the hierarchy of society, with a vast slave labor force. By 1800, Afro-descendants already accounted for two thirds of the population (Sellier, 2006). The culturally visible African footprint remains to this day. With a coastline of 7,408 km, Brazil is defined “from a geopolitical point of view” as “a mixed continental-maritime state, with a predominance in maritime vocations” (Meira Mattos, 1990, p. 59).

Colombia, in turn, was a Spanish colony that favored the Andean cities of the interior. The coast was originally controlled by Santa Marta and Cartagena, but in the early 16th century, the New Kingdom of Granada⁵ was established around Santa Fe de Bogotá, which became the center of its political power. Today, inland cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Bucaramanga, with the exception of Barranquilla, are the most developed urban centers in the country.

According to geopolitical scientist Julio Londoño, “Colombia has a centripetal spatial vision,” *i.e.* “the strength of the country is condensed in the interior” (1949, p. 139). For Londoño, the Atlantic coast “is separated from the heartland and it will be many years before it can be incorporated” (1949, p. 89). Although the reality described by Londoño at the end of the 1940s is far from the one that characterizes Colombia today, some characteristics do exist to this day, as this paper shall explain.

Brazil’s territory covers nearly half of South America and has more than 200 million inhabitants. Its geopolitical traits should make the country a regional power with plausible pretensions to be a world power. Celso Lafer also points out that due to the multiethnic composition and continental scale, the nation represents “another West, poorer, more enigmatic, more problematic, but no less the West” (2002, p. 50); determining factors that, according to the same author, are part of the “international identity” of the country (2002, p. 50), to which one could add, are its Atlantic identity.

In turn, Colombia with its Pacific and Atlantic coasts “is a maritime country because nearly 50% of its territory is its maritime areas” (Sánchez, 2001, p. 58). However, some authors emphasize that despite these characteristics, outside the use of a narrow strip of internal and maritime waters, the Andean country “has abandoned the rest of its maritime territory” (2001, p. 49).

The two nations have concentrated their efforts on ensuring maritime security with different approaches, as will be discussed below. It is worth noting that, as Germond (2015) states, in academic debates, maritime security has not been given great importance and only in the early 21st century did it become relevant in these discussions. The author defines it as “a set of policies, regulations, measures and operations to secure the maritime domain” (2015, p. 137). Germond suggests that when we seek to study maritime security in

⁵ Originally placed under the Viceroyalty of Peru.

a geo-strategic dimension we should articulate it with naval geo-strategy and transatlantic security. The present article will focus mainly on analyzing the meaning of maritime security both for Brazil and Colombia's visions of the Atlantic, for their role in South America and for their strategic identities.

The present article will analyze the geopolitical visions that were developed on the part of Brazil and Colombia regarding the South Atlantic in the 20th and early 21st centuries, in order to evaluate how relevant the ocean is in terms of development, defense and regional security for each of the countries. The comparative approach will be applied to the case study in order to analyze the fundamental differences that exist between the two countries in order to understand the relevance of the South Atlantic for the two nations.

Thereafter, the strategies used by Brazil and Colombia related to their respective South Atlantic geo-strategic visions will be studied in order to assess how important (or unimportant) the South Atlantic is for their development and defense objectives, in national and regional terms.

Theoretical approaches to the topic

In order to analyze the strategy of nations, it is important to bear in mind that there are several approaches to it. The one that usually predominates in academic studies is that of the realists or neo-realists. According to Mearsheimer (2001), the strategy of great world powers is a combination of power and fear, which determines the degree of competition in the world to ensure their security, as well as the likelihood of involvement in war.

Mearsheimer (2001) argues that fear leads the powers to focus, mainly, on assuring their military offensive capabilities. Thus, for the offensive neo-realists, the States are mainly focused on defining which countries are threats to their survival, based essentially on the offensive capabilities of their rivals and not on their intentions. War is the natural and obvious outcome of this competition. According to van Hooft (2017) Great Strategy does not need to be grandiose or ambitious, but rather due to the fact that it is originated in the military field, its purpose is to lead to the successful use of military force in times of war, and of peace. In peace, it is related to the use of coercion and deterrence. In the case of Brazil this is especially relevant.

For Legro (2005), power is a tool. However, this does not always explain the strategy of nations to achieve their goals, because the case studies analyzed by this scholar are not conclusive in terms of the loss of power of a nation, internationally. He gives as an example the case of the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 20th century, when they were losing power to the United States, without entering into war with this country. The explanation for Legro is that it is related to the existence of lasting ideas that united the two nations.

Legro (2005) emphasizes how ideas interact on a regular basis with "strategic circumstances" and internal political pressures in his study. Based on the grand strategy defined

by Barry Posen,⁶ he focuses on beliefs related to “effective means for achieving interests and how States think about achieving their ends” (2005, p. 7). Legro observes that there are several types of ideas, such as identity, preferences and causal beliefs, which must be studied in interaction with the international scenario, in order to understand the Grand Strategy. The author emphasizes that, in the case study of the United States, there has been an interaction between ideas and events that led the country to leave its traditional position of isolating itself as a result of the end of the First World War, moving to a stance of intervention and of internationalism after World War II. This regards a shift in the ideology of foreign policy that made popular considerations in geopolitics.

Grand Strategy is conceptualized by Brands (2010) as “the relationship of means to ends, the process by which nations harness and allocate resources in the service of their international objectives” (2010, p. 60). The same author argues that Grand Strategy “represents an integrated conception of interests, threats, resources, and policies” (Brands, 2012, p. 4). Russell and Tokatlian (2013), in turn, argue that the “small strategies of Latin America,” although designed in the first place for local challenges and threats, opened a window of opportunity to apply autonomy and/or acquiescence to the strategies of Latin America’s relations with the world, emphasizing relations with the United States. In other words, the strategy of Latin American countries aims mainly to apply autonomous strategies and/or acquiescence in their extra-regional relations.⁷ Moreover, Milani and Nery (2019, p. 74) argue that “a grand strategy supposes a self-conscious identification and priority-setting in terms of foreign policy, defense goals, international cooperation, and partnerships with national businesses.”

The present article shall examine the meaning of the South Atlantic in the way Brazil and Colombia visualize their strategic identity as nations that aspire to position themselves as security referents in South America. Articulated with these aspects are the issues of how naval strategies have a linkage to Grand strategy. Moreover, maritime power, according to Ribeiro Luís, “regards all the resources used and activities carried out by the navy, including land administration” (Ribeiro Luís, 2015, p. 124). This paper will analyze how concepts of strategic identity explain the Grand strategy of South American countries such as Brazil and Colombia.

We shall start from the premise that the Grand strategy of nations is closely articulated with the study of strategic identity (SI); the latter, as defined by Tibiletti (2014). For him, SI includes the national strategic identity, which covers political geography, as well as so-

⁶ Posen (2014, p. 1) defines grand strategy as “a nation-state’s theory about how to produce security for itself”. In an interview with Scott Beauchamp, Barry Posen defined Great strategy as “basically a set of concepts that outlines threats, discusses political and military remedies, talks a little bit about why those remedies might work, assigns some priorities to threats and to remedies, and it has to be conscious of scarcity. There’s usually some limited amount of resources that state has to spend on its purpose” (Beauchamp, 2014).

⁷ As for a comparative case study between Mexico and Brazil see Da Silva Guevara and Ardila (2018).

cial, ideological and cultural aspects, among others, which, in turn, is articulated with the dialogue that feeds with its sub-regional, regional and global environment. It also consists of vital and strategic national interests, being a social construction. For Tibiletti (2014) the visions within a nation in terms of the construction or deconstruction of its strategic identity are always made in consensus with the other States.

In this comparative case, this paper will also take into account critical geopolitics, since this theoretical approach is based on the assumption that it is necessary to study the discourses of geopolitics and international relations from the elites, which start from the perception of the world. The latter includes assumptions, norms and conventions (Dodds, 2005). Moreover, O'Tuathail and Dalby (2002, pp. 307-308), key figures related to the research on critical geopolitics, argue that "The popular representations of Others are part of the larger process whereby geopolitical imaginations are used in the process of foreign policy formulations." The truth is that, despite not representing any monolithic theory, critical geopolitics draws attention to the fact that the world view is not objective, but that geopolitics must be "conceptualized as much as discourse, as political practice" (Dodds, 2005, p. 31).

This article examines in a comparative manner the practice of "spatialization" of regional and world politics, not so much from the perspective of the process that led to having strategic options, but from the implicit practice that led to the choices of strategic options regarding the insertion of Brazil and Colombia into their South American environment. O Toal (ÓTuathail) (2005, p. 46) states that the "study of geopolitics is the study of the spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states." Nonetheless, geopolitical and geostrategic analyzes should also take into account the strategic visions of the Global South, and among others, of Latin American countries.

In line with what was stated by Kuus (2017), it is necessary to dismantle binary approaches, such as East/West or development/underdevelopment, which still remain in the geopolitical assumptions of international studies. This implies that we have to study more closely, among other things, the geopolitical visions embodied in South American strategies to spatialize their environment; in the present case study the one in regard to the South Atlantic. It is mainly about analyzing how different visions of the interaction between the borders of South American countries and their maritime environment mean (or not) a potentialization of their significance as guarantors of regional development, as well as their roles in the stability of regional security.

The above mentioned means that when this paper refers to strategic visions of the South Atlantic from Brazil and Colombia, it takes into account that the positioning sought by the two nations in South America in their Grand strategy, with the contribution of its academic elites and military circles, among others, does not derive from an objective geopolitical reality, but rather from an ideational tradition, as well as material factors, based on different visions in terms of development, defense and regional security. It is noteworthy that in South

America there are significant divergences of conceptual approaches in terms of what development means; for example, Brazil supports development proposals for the region that do not coincide with those of other countries.⁸

Brazil and Colombia: Strategic Concepts on the South Atlantic

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Brazilian Navy coined the concept of “Blue Amazon”, which “designates the Brazilian maritime spaces, in an area about 4.5 million km, corresponding in size, to the terrestrial Amazon” (Ministry of Defense, Brazil, n. d.). Attached to the Blue Amazon is the Articulation and Defense Equipment Plan (PAED in Portuguese), which seeks to strengthen the country’s capacity to act autonomously on the international scene, reducing its weaknesses in the face of external pressures (Ministério da Defesa, Brasil, n.d.). The emergence of the concept of the Blue Amazon shows, according to Mattos, et al. (2017, p. 268), the sense of “greatness” and “projects [Brazil] as a motor of development and contributes to the country’s desire to be seen as ‘the nation of the future’”.

In 2012 when the National Defense Plan (NDP) was published, it was highlighted that Brazil visualized its “strategic environment,” by embracing the African countries near the Atlantic and the Antarctica. According to Fiori (2013) the African countries on the Atlantic coast would become an important region of influence of Brazil. The same author emphasizes that since the 70s the Brazilian Navy had begun to develop its own autonomous plan in the Atlantic with the Strategic Plan of the Navy. In reality, the country sought to obtain greater autonomy in the international system.

In the early 21st century, under Lula da Silva (2003-2010), Brazil was seeking “autonomy through diversification,” which according to Vigevani and Cepaluni (2009, p.6) was to give special importance to South-South relations. The goal was to obtain a better “capacity to negotiate with more powerful countries,” promoting multipolarity. Moreover, Brazil was positioning itself in the South Atlantic⁹ with cooperation initiatives that aimed at a novel approach in which regional security and development were closely connected. This geopo-

⁸ See for example Stuhldreher (2017).

⁹ Freres (2013) draws attention to the fact that there is no consensus among the authors on the delimitation of the South Atlantic. While in some studies they define it as “all the countries of the Atlantic basin below the Tropic of Cancer” (2013, p. 127), others place it south of the dividing line south of the 15th parallel, between Trinidad and Tobago and Dakar. As for Freres himself, he prefers a broader conception of the South Atlantic that “covers from Mexico to Argentina, on the one hand, and all of Africa on the other” (2013:127). In turn, Ribeiro Luís (2016) prefers the delimitation of the South Atlantic according to what was adopted by the International Hydrographic Organization in 1953, but ends up considering that “more than a geographical definition, the South Atlantic is a political designation, as in a group of countries that share similar political concerns related to the sea, covering the signatory countries of Zopacas.” (2016: 84).

litical vision incorporated a multidimensional paradigm in which military security became tied to food or environmental security, among other issues within the framework of non-traditional security aspects (Da Silva Guevara, 2018).

According to the above mentioned Brazil's South-South relations, in the line of its strategic environment's conceptualization, especially with African countries of the Atlantic coast, it could be seen in the light of a "soft revisionism," stressed by Milani and Nery (2019) as related to the governments of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff. Thus, the concept of Blue Amazon can be considered beyond a simple protection of natural resources or commercial routes, being also studied in the line of a linkage to geopolitical visions related to a South Atlantic as a more autonomous zone in favor of the Global South under Brazilian leadership.

Brands points out that during the eight years of the presidency of Lula da Silva, the Grand strategy followed by the country was based on three priority axes, namely 1) balancing against the United States; 2) the construction of coalitions to strengthen the bargaining power of Brazil and 3) the strengthening of the country's leadership in South America. Despite the shift on this policy since 2015 and, above all, after the impeachment process of Dilma Rousseff, these three axes are still useful to analyze. This article is focused, above all, on the South Atlantic, viewing it as relevant axis of Brazil's Grand strategy, compared to Colombia.

The relevance of a South Atlantic's axis has historical precedents in Brazilian geopolitical schools. For example, Therezinha de Castro (1986) emphasizes that "we continue, in spite of our continentality, much more connected to the sea; near the Atlantic lies our geo-historic nucleus and our state *ecunem*" (Castro, 1986, p. 17). As for Golbery do Couto e Silva (1967), he foresaw for Brazil the need for the country to take the leadership of the developing world, in order to consolidate an area in the South Atlantic that articulated the security to development, for the sake of promoting an area of peaceful stability.

It should be noted that when do Couto e Silva vindicated Brazil's role in defense of regional and even hemispheric defense and security, it did not consider development issues to such a long extent, as today, or at least not according to the approaches that Brazil supports in the 21st century. However, he argued that security and development were closely linked (1967). Today, Brazil strengthens the United Nations approach to a "green economy in the context of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty" (cited in Stuhldreher, 2017, p. 81). Additionally, it should be noted that, unlike countries like Colombia, Brazil has emphasized, in terms of cooperation initiatives, especially during the governments that it has had in the 21st century, an integral conceptualization of development and regional security and defense.

As for Colombia, Julio Londoño (1949, p.37), although acknowledging that the Atlantic is "the sea of the great navigation axes of the continental masses," he emphasizes that "the Pacific coast is more straight and open than the Atlantic," seeing in these aspects an obstacle for the Atlantic side of the country to show promise. On the other hand, he observed that Colombia's relations with Panama took on the character of a strategic concept and that

“in the way we understand these relationships and the capacity we have to handle them, a large part of our future is locked in.” (Londoño, 1949, p. 136).

Similarly, one could conclude from the comments of the Colombian military regarding the historical past of the dissolution of the Great Colombia, that the country created a new space on which it had to rethink its reconstruction as a nation. Despite writing the book in the forties of the twentieth century, Londoño stressed that Colombia had not yet overcome the “trauma” of the loss of territory and sought through a “symbiosis” of “geography and politics” to try “an intelligent and profound reconciliation” (1949, pp. 152-153). The loss of a strategic position in the Panamanian isthmus would undoubtedly affect the way Colombia would relate to its maritime surfaces. As Drekonja points out in this regard, the loss of Panama implied a “geopolitical devaluation” for Colombia (2011, p. 53).

Colombia, according to Sánchez (2001, p. 213), “lives with its back to the sea.” This despite the fact that its maritime surface is 928,660 km² (Instituto Codazzi, n.d.), encompassing a maritime jurisdictional area similar to that of its continental and insular territories, that is, Colombia is half sea (Invemar, n.d.). The major criticism that Sánchez (2001) makes to the maritime policy guidelines of Colombia is that the general interest was not taken into account due to individual economic interests. Likewise, foreign advisers had warned that Colombian shipping companies did not have the conditions to compete in the globalized market.

Sánchez (2001) concludes that although it is true that the Colombian marine merchants had created a “strategic vision,” it ended up capsizing in the face of the lack of a long-term perspective. Finally, “fifty years after its creation,” the country witnessed “its death and third burial” (Sánchez, 2001, p. 245). On the other hand, according to the same author, the Maritime Policy of Colombia neglected the ports, which led to the failure of the country’s maritime policy.

Colombia was one of the first countries to raise the subject of the heritage sea, whereby it was justified that countries could claim an area of 200 miles to “ensure that their resources contribute to national development and the subsistence of their peoples” (Sánchez, 2001, p. 328), which would lead to the recognition of the exclusive economic zone for countries with a coastline. However, criticism was made regarding the failure of Colombia to take measures to implement those rights.

In the 70s Brazil adhered to the Treaty of Antarctica. On this topic, the geopolitical scientist Terezinha de Castro (1986: 21) emphasized that “Antarctica, together with the Brazilian islands and sub-Antarctic archipelagos, constitute important fronts of our defense in the South Atlantic.” Therefore, in the signing of the Antarctic Treaty, a geopolitical and geo-strategic conceptualization that encompassed Brazilian regional and national security was implied. With this treaty, the new concept of a neighborhood on the “Eastern border,” favored by the Atlantic, emerged (Barbosa cited in Penha, 2011, p. 218). As for Colombia, the country would only accept the Antarctic Treaty in 1989.

At the end of the 80s, Brazil launched the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (Zopacas) initiative. This initiative had been presented in 1986 within the framework of the United Nations and although approved, Washington had voted against that resolution. Brazil sought, objectively, to promote a zone of denuclearized peace in the South Atlantic, although it also aimed to “avoid the implementation of foreign bases and the elimination of foci of conflict and intrazonal tension” (Yapur cited in Aranda e Silva, 2010, p. 26). The initiative was framed in the context of the end of the Cold War, by which the South American country sought to consolidate its defensive and economic interests in the South Atlantic, even against the pretensions of the United States or its allies, especially the United Kingdom, at the same time that it tried to strengthen ties with the African countries of the Atlantic.

At the same time Bogotá in the eighties strengthened ties with Washington in order to contain the Nicaraguan claims regarding the archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia. However, the interaction should not be taken as subordination, because President Turbay (1978-1982) encouraged the inclusion of Colombia in the Non-Aligned Movement and produced a shift on the anti-Argentina position of his predecessor. Turbay also spoke in favor of greater solidarity with the so-called Third World (Bagley and Tokatlián, 2011). On the other hand, “Bogotá’s desire to be recognized as a “regional power” in the Caribbean, precisely because it was not taken into account by Washington, aroused an interest in the Caribbean and additionally “in concentric circles” (Drekonja, 2011, p. 69).

Brazil, on the other hand, sought to solidify its ties with Africa, based on geographic proximity and cultural ties, which “would facilitate the promotion of independent regional interactions of the great powers” (Penha, 2011, p. 218). The country’s efforts to promote Zopacas in the 1980s were similarly articulated with Brazil’s efforts in the UN to consolidate itself as “the voice of the voiceless.” Foreign Minister Araújo Castro’s three-D speech became famous, for which Brazil promoted Decolonization, Development and Disarmament (Lafer, 2002). In turn, historian Amado Cervo emphasizes that the country followed a line of “diplomacy for development” until the 1990s (2001, p. 56). Brazil, according to this approach, would lead the South to development, being that issues of regional security and defense would be closely tied to the development of South American and African countries, through which the Atlantic would be a bridge between peoples.

The Colombian leadership was more recently expressed on issues of transnational security in the Atlantic, by virtue of a meeting in Ghana between Colombia and African countries, in June 2017, whereby working mechanisms were agreed between the Andean country and the police of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, among others, regarding intelligence, training in identification procedures, destruction of narcotics and transnational crime (Colombian Foreign Affairs, 2017). This is one of many examples of Colombian leadership in dealing with security issues in the South Atlantic.

In turn, for the United States, Colombia could serve as a strategic area of containment of Brazil, meaning the Andean country could be included in a strategic fence, which would allow the United States to eventually contain and monitor the actions of Brazil. This logic is followed by Ostos Cetina (2011), who states that Washington turns Bogotá into its rimland. On the other hand, considering some of the premises of critical geopolitics, Colombia consciously assumes the role of a country that exercises restraint on Brazil, based on the self-perception of an alternative reference to Brasilia for the stability of regional security. In other words, the Andean country is no longer a passive object of the North American strategy, but rather an active subject of a triangular strategy that allows it to gain prominence in the South American region. In the Bogotá-Washington-African countries interaction, the role of each of the two poles is no longer static, but reshape a relationship that is no longer South-North, or traditional dependency, but allows us to reconstruct a regional security autonomizing space in which the boundaries between North and South vanish.

The 2015-2018 Colombian Strategic Naval Plan (PEN in Spanish) mentions the strategic environment of the country in regard to Latin America and the Caribbean, including factors that endanger national security, such as the illegal exploitation of natural resources and border disputes (National Navy of Colombia, n.d.). Moreover, the PEN mentions the “adverse ruling” made by The Hague at the end of 2012 regarding the maritime boundaries between Colombia and Nicaragua, which “has posed important national challenges for the future” (National Navy of Colombia, n.d., p. 21). It also emphasizes the importance of consolidating the national Navy as “a Navy with dissuasive capacity” (11).

In Colombia, although the official speeches are not so blunt in this regard, the country cultivates its stabilizing role in maritime security, especially as a bridge between Washington and West Africa, emphasizing its role as a reference in the fight against transnational crime.

It was possible to verify in this section that, while the Brazilian conception of a strategic environment in the South Atlantic aims at positioning the country as promoter of an autonomous area, enhancing an integral, multidimensional security for the South American and African peoples, for Colombia it rather aimed to give the image of a guardian, enhancing the fight against transnational crime, making the bridge between North and South. In the next section it will be seen how the two nations pursue their respective strategies in order to advance their different geopolitical approaches and goals related to the South Atlantic.

Security Strategies in the South Atlantic: Brazil vis-à-vis Colombia

According to Pereyra (2013: 12) “Brazil’s position in the international system is ambiguous,” acting in “a hybrid position between the North and South,” which explains some of the country’s strategic options regarding the South Atlantic. In the draft regarding the

White Book of National Defense, approved by former President Temer¹⁰ and placed under discussion in the Brazilian Congress, it is emphasized that “in geopolitical terms, Brazil gives priority to its immediate environment, defined as a strategic environment, constituted by South America, the South Atlantic, the west coast of Africa and the Antarctic.” It is also emphasized that the country promotes a “cooperative multipolarity,” by which “governance mechanisms more representative of the new international reality are being fostered” (Ministry of Defense, Brazil, 2017).

Therefore, it is possible to verify in the official objectives of Brazil regarding the South Atlantic, the ambition to consolidate a geostrategic area of security and development for the Global South, by which the nation seeks the leadership of the ambitions of the South, even if it goes against the interests of extra-regional powers. This concerns emancipatory and autonomizing contours, and maybe revisionists.¹¹

According to former Brazilian Minister for Defense, Raul Jungman, “part of our immediate strategic environment, the South Atlantic is the living space for Brazil” (2017). Among the arguments advanced by the minister was that this ocean contains mineral reserves and 95% of Brazil’s international trade routes. In this regard, to what extent does Brazil transform and shape a new strategic identity with African countries, moving away from a traditional Ratzelian vision of “living space?” Kuus (2017) emphasizes that critical geopolitics is not so much about investigating the limits of sovereignty, but “how the power of the State is produced discursively and in practice in territorial and non-territorial forms.” The identity strategic of states is built and (re)built based on self-perceptions and the perceptions of other states.

In the 21st century, Colombia and its strategists are focused on building and consolidating the sovereignty of the country in the oceans. If necessary, in spite of the interference of third parties. Sánchez stresses that “interference of third parties to prevent Colombia and its nationals from using and exploiting the resources of the ocean and coastal spaces must be counteracted by its military power” (2001, p. 370). Regarding the court decision of The Hague in the Nicaragua-Colombia dispute, a document from the Colombian Foreign Ministry mentions that the “expansionist desires of Nicaragua” will be obstructed (Colombian Foreign Ministry, n. d.).

Colombia also claims regional leadership in the seas, as observed in the statement of Admiral Soltau (Colombian Ocean Commission, n. d., p. 26) according to which “the in-

¹⁰ Temer became President of Brazil in August 2016 after an impeachment process that removed Dilma Rousseff from office.

¹¹ It is not the object of the present article to deepen revisionism on the part of Brazil. According to Morse and Keohane (2014), contested multilateralism is defined as “the situation that results from the pursuit of strategies by states, multilateral organizations and non-state actors to use multilateral institutions, existing or newly created, to challenge the rules, practices or missions of existing multilateral institutions” (p. 387).

tegral management of its maritime territory is a fundamental bastion in the generation of regional leadership, whose benefits for Colombians and for all America are obvious.” It remains to be seen whether the shortcomings of the capabilities of the navy will allow this role to be specified.

As for Brazil, Mattos *et al.* (2017, p. 267) observe that the South Atlantic region “has a profound strategic importance” for the country. Issues of development in alliance with a Global South, emancipated through their transatlantic ties, are again and again emphasized in the official speeches of the Brazilian leaders. However, Aranda e Silva (2010) emphasizes that the strengthening of Brazil’s role in the South Atlantic may lead to confrontations with the United States. As for China and Russia, these relations with Brazil are still unclear.

Milani and Nery (2019, p. 80) rightly stress that “Brazilian foreign policy has often had a strong developmentist component.” In order to understand the link between this component and the strategies pursued by Brazil related to the South Atlantic, mainly regarding African nations, it is important to take into account that the country has strongly invested in international cooperation. Abdenur and Marcondes (2013) argue that this aspect aims at consolidating a “South Atlantic identity,” pursuing its own regional goals and interests. Brazil’s South-South development cooperation has embraced military issues, along with agro-technological and health programmes. Agriculture has been one of the main cooperation areas between Brazil and the African countries, embracing the participation of various ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of Social development (Milani *et al.*, 2016).

Emerging countries use development assistance to promote their economic international insertion (Burges, 2012). Nonetheless, it is important to take into account not only economic goals regarding South-South solidarity, but also a Grand strategy that includes a South Atlantic axis, in order to improve an autonomous area under Brazilian leadership.

As for Colombia, its Grand strategy can be verified by the actions of the country by establishing itself as a Middle Oceanic Power. Vera (2017, p. 41) emphasizes that “Colombia has being projected itself as an intermediate power that aims to influence and even guide some speeches and practices of international security and on specific issues [...] of the international agenda.” In turn, Ardila (2012) defines Colombia as “a secondary power in the process of definition” between Central America and South America. In fact, Colombia has actively participated in regional security cooperation networks, especially with Central America. This cooperation has covered not only the fight against illegal drug trafficking and transnational crime, but also the preventive and social policy of citizen security, by building a sub-regional security order with multilevel coordination (Vera, 2017).

Tickner and Morales (2015) state that the opening of the Colombian embassy in Ghana in 2014 is related to the objective of expanding its cooperation with Africa within the framework of regional security. This objective is in line with a triangulated cooperation strategy

between African countries, Colombia and the United States, which seeks above all to deal with transnational crime. Tickner (personal communication, March 2018) emphasizes that such cooperation can be understood in two ways, namely 1) The United States prefers to work with Colombia, instead of intervening directly in third world countries and 2) From the Colombian perspective, there is a regional and international strategy, positioning itself as an expert country in security issues, especially in issues related to drug trafficking and organized crime.

Colombia has built up the Security Strategy towards Africa, launched in 2011. It aimed to coordinate activities regarding international crime, violence and human rights, among others (Borda and Morales, 2017). It is important to take into account that the country has, since 2015, redefined its policy against illegal drugs, but as Borda and Morales stress, there is a contradiction between its foreign policy against drugs and its domestic policy, along with the problem of the 2016 peace agreement between the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the Colombian government.

Flemes (2010) argues that regional powers are part of a region with geographic, economic and political-ideational characteristics. In the same way they articulate ambitions to lead a region, the effectively influence international affairs and define substantially the regional security agenda. Regarding these characteristics, Brasilia undoubtedly uses the South Atlantic to consolidate its leadership as a regional power. In turn, Bogotá does it on some occasions and on sectorial issues, but to a lesser degree than Brazil and with a less clear conceptualization.

Finally, this article tries to understand how various conceptualizations on the South Atlantic are related to strategies this regarding developed by Brazil and Colombia. It is pertinent to mention that as for Brazil, the South Atlantic represents an area of consolidation of its national power, but at the same time it serves as a bridge-country, for example when its ties with Africa allow it to enhance its discourse of the “voice of the voiceless.” This gives it legitimacy when it promotes cooperation in defense with countries such as Angola or Namibia. In turn, Colombia, as Chile and Argentina, “use soft power¹² and public diplomacy to improve their image, exercise leadership, build new alliances and seek a new regional balance” (Ardila, 2014, p. 90). In this regional balance, the Pacific and the Atlantic are vital for Bogotá. With respect to the Pacific Alliance, Pastrana Buelvas, Betancourt y Castro (2014, p. 181) state that “it does not intend to exclude the United States but, on the contrary, privileges their relationship with the superpower”.

The above allows for a differentiation Brazil from the Colombian case: Brasilia has tried to move the United States and the United Kingdom away from the maritime zone, which would eventually enable the formation of a Pax Brasiliana as defined by Mattos *et al.* Ar-

¹² Vera (2017) prefers to mention a combined use of soft and hard strategies on the part of Colombia.

royave (2012, p. 251), in turn, emphasizes that “through South Americanism, Brazil intends to configure a regional-South America-free zone from the influence of other regional powers, especially the United States”. However, since 2016 the new government of Temer has shown a propensity to collaborate with the United Kingdom on the issue of the Falklands/Malvinas, breaking the solidarity with Argentina regarding the claims of Buenos Aires in the archipelago.

It is possible to state that organizations such as Zopacas, despite having a lax structure, could advance, from the viewpoint of Brasilia, an autonomizing area, protecting South America and Africa from extra-regional powers’ ambitions. Nonetheless, while Brazil aims to shape an institutional autonomizing multilateral structure in the South Atlantic, Colombia does not seek to do so, due to fears that this organizations could limit its margin of action, externally and internally.

Conclusion

Brazil and Colombia have different geopolitical visions of their Atlantic maritime spaces. The evidence is overwhelming that the two nations make efforts to think about their strategic environment in order to better insert themselves in the South American space, as well as to contribute to the development of their national spaces. However, it was Brazil that went the furthest in conceptualizing a South Atlantic that, in consolidating a regional governance, may, in the future, form a more autonomous area in terms of security, defense and sustainable development. In the case of Colombia, the efforts to expand its area of influence to the Antarctic shows that in the 21st century the nation stopped being so focused on its continental spaces and is looking for new strategic horizons.

In the 60s and especially in the 70s, Brazil sought not only to create an autonomizing space guided by the diversification of its relations, such as those established with Germany for a nuclear agreement in 1975, but also by the consolidation of a more autonomous maritime space of the great powers, especially, at that time, of the United States. In the 21st century, Brazil’s official objectives with respect to the South Atlantic demonstrate the ambition to consolidate a geostrategic area of security and development for the global South, through which the nation seeks leadership in the South’s ambitions, even if these go against the interests of extra-regional powers... all this within an emancipatory and autonomizing framework.

Colombia, with the loss of Panama in the early 20th century, had suffered, according to Drekonja’s definition, a “geopolitical devaluation.” It seeks, in the 21st century, to reposition itself in the South Atlantic as a referent for security, but in proportions more modest than Brazil. However, the triangular cooperation between Colombia, the United States and some

African countries leads us to conclude that their initiatives to position their geostrategic interests are in favor of being a Middle Oceanic power.

Both countries seek to be a bridge between the South and the North. Brazil has positioned itself as the voice of the underprivileged against an apathetic North towards the development problems of the global South, in a more autonomous position which is committed to making the South Atlantic an area that emancipates itself from extra-regional models, while Colombia is seeking cooperation with the North to enhance its role as a reference for security, especially in terms of transnational crime.

Based on the definition of Tibiletti (2014) of strategic identity, it is possible to conclude that the visions within a nation regarding the construction or deconstruction of its identity are always made in dialogue with the other States. Similarly, following some of the premises of critical geopolitics, it was possible to observe that the construction and reconstruction of the strategic identities of Brazil and Colombia are articulated in dynamics for which the American environment and the South Atlantic are reshaped in an interaction of maritime neighbors and powers of the South and the North.

While in classical geopolitics notions such as living space or zones of influence are rigid, and correspond rather to more static strategic identities, the focus of this article makes it possible to demonstrate that the way countries such as Brazil and Colombia reimagine South American and South Atlantic environments is less static.

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