

NATO - Latin America Future Cooperation

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<i>Contributing Author</i>	Dr Carlos Gustavo Poggio Teixeira, Assistant Professor of International Relations at Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado (FAAP), São Paulo, Brazil
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by emailing us at:

Oke.Thorngren@act.nato.int

Georgios.Kotas@act.nato.int

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NATO – Latin America Future Cooperation

Latin America is perhaps the region of the world that has received less attention from NATO. When considering the South Atlantic region, countries in the western African coast tend to have closer relations with the North Atlantic organization than countries in Latin America. Mauritania, for example, has had an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) in the context of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue since 1995. Conversely, NATO did not have any partners in Latin America until 2018, when Colombia was recognized as a global partner, the first – and so far, the only - Latin American country to formalize its relationship with the military alliance. Moreover, NATO has conducted in the last few years joint military operations with Cape Verde, Ghana and other countries of the western African coast, but none with countries in Latin America. As a matter of fact, NATO's presence in the South Atlantic in general, and in Latin America in particular, has received little academic discussion. The historical and political context of Latin America differs from the reality of central and eastern Europe or the Middle East where the organization has primarily acted. The academic literature investigating the organization's motivations in Latin America and how this presence is articulated with economic, security, and political aspects on the region is limited. Based on some of the few studies¹ on the subject, this paper presents the limitations and interests of NATO's involvement in Latin America, as well as the types of activities implemented. The paper will attempt to illustrate how the South Atlantic has gradually become a strategic stage for testing and designing NATO's forces in the face of new challenges, bearing in mind discussions about out-of-area missions, members' interests (in particular the United States, England, France, Portugal, Spain) and the critical perspectives of the regional powers (Brazil and Argentina).

¹ Bartolomé, Mariano C. "El Conflicto del Atlántico Sur: la hipótesis de una guerra fabricada". *Boletín del Centro Naval*, n. 786, Abr-Jun. 1997. Available at: <http://www.centronaval.org.ar/boletin/BCN834/834-BARTOLOME.pdf>; Coker, Christopher. *NATO, the Warsaw Pact and Africa*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1985; Hurrell, Andrew. "NATO and the South Atlantic: A Case-Study in the Complexities of Out-of-area Operations". In: Coker, Christopher (Ed.). *The United States, Western Europe and Military Intervention Overseas*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1988, pp. 61-84; Viegas Filho, José. *A Segurança do Atlântico Sul e as relações com a África*. Brasília: Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 2016. Available at: <http://funag.gov.br/loja/download/1180-a-seguranca-do-atlantico-sul-e-as-relacoes-com-aafrica.pdf>.

Historical Context

During the Cold War, the so called “Third World” was considered as a “secondary theatre of operations”² and could serve only as strategic supply bases for NATO. Areas such as the Mediterranean, Middle East, South Atlantic and Indian Ocean constituted trade routes, markets and sources of raw materials.³ However, there was no policy formulation specific to out-of-area operations, although NATO Secretary General Manlio Brosio in 1965 had held meetings in that direction, and the alliance remained focused in the principle of collective defense under article 5.

Among the members of the alliance, there were stark divergences of interest, threat perceptions, and budget constraints. From the perspective of the United States, the Caribbean Basin and South Atlantic meant more to their own hemispheric security than from the perspective of the Europeans. While the United States, the United Kingdom, and France began advocating a broader global role for the organization, countries such as Iceland, Denmark, Greece, Canada, Turkey, Norway, West Germany, Italy, and Belgium preferred NATO to maintain its stricter regional scope. The latter group feared that an expanded range of action would provoke hostilities from the Soviet Union and divert NATO resources for purposes other than European security.⁴

In the 1970s, for the first time the South Atlantic was involved in NATO's security agenda. But the focus remained on the African coast rather than in Latin America. The Soviet presence in obstructing Maritime Communication Lines (MCL) and the trading of oil and other raw materials became a concern for Western powers. The South Atlantic was an alternative way of trading commodities crucial to the industries in the Northern Hemisphere.⁵ The importance of the Cape of Good Hope route became more evident when the Suez Canal was closed by Egypt in 1967.⁶ However, without formalizing a specific policy on out-of-area operations, NATO's performance in the region was restricted.

It was only in the 1980s that Latin America gained some degree of relevance from the perspective of NATO. In the context of the Malvinas/Falklands dispute, it was considered the creation of a defense mechanism in the region, highlighting the value of

² Coker, 1985, p.11

³ Bartolomé, 1997.

⁴ Coker, 1985; Hurrell, 1988.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Penha, Eli Alves. *Relações Brasil-África e Geopolítica do atlântico Sul*. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2011.

the Falklands Islands as a strategic base. NATO Secretary-General Joseph Luns expressed an interest in including the South Atlantic in the collective defense pact. At the British conference of the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies, it was considered to expand NATO's defense responsibilities to other locations and to delegate an enforcement role to the United Kingdom.⁷ In 1981, in the context of rising hostilities with the Soviets and during Ronald Reagan's first year as president, the NATO was involved in a naval exercise in conjunction with Latin American navies, known as Ocean Venture 81. The operation aimed to keep safe routes in the North and South Atlantic and the Baltic, with the participation of members of NATO together with 14 other countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Chile. As then US Secretary of Navy, John Lehman notes, "It was the largest such exercise in anyone's memory".⁸ Some NATO allies, notably the Norwegians, expressed concerns that this kind of exercise extended NATO's scope beyond the area stipulated in the North Atlantic Treaty. Moreover, the Norwegians and other allies, demonstrated concerns in participating in a joint exercise with Latin American military dictatorships.

With the end of the Cold War, NATO experienced a period of transformation in operational and institutional capacities in order to adapt to the new security scenario. The alliance expanded its scope of action with the intervention in Bosnia Herzegovina, followed by several other undertakings like Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and others. The use of the organization in interventions outside the Euro-Atlantic sphere, as pointed out by Ratti⁹, Sireci and Coletta¹⁰, serves as, among other things, a mechanism for gaining legitimacy to US operations – "Since its establishment in 1949 the alliance has served the fundamental U.S. interest: it has provided a multilateral framework for the legitimization and exercise of American influence and power".¹¹ For Europeans, preserving NATO guarantees a highly equipped military and nuclear structure to defend their territories, and military power projection capability. The post-9/11 was a milestone

⁷ Coker, 1985.

⁸ Lehman, John. *Oceans Ventured: Winning the Cold War at Sea*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2018. p. 77

⁹ Ratti, Luca. "Post-Cold War NATO and international relations theory: The case for neoclassical realism." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, v.4, n.1, p.81-110, 2006. Available at <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/14794010608656841?scroll=top>>

¹⁰ Sireci, Jonathan; Coletta, Damon. "Enduring without an Enemy: NATO's Realist Foundation." *Perspectives*, v.17, n.1 p.57-81, 2009. Available at: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23616104>>

¹¹ Ratti, 2006, p. 98

in building NATO's global role.¹² The organization ventured out of Europe in charge of ISAF in Afghanistan, and it expanded partnerships and contacts with many regions of the world (Asia, Caucasus, Middle East, South Atlantic).

These functional changes of the Alliance have been depicted in its Strategic Concepts. The last two Strategic Concepts (1999 and 2010) have brought new approaches to out-of-area issues. Military actions outside the geographical boundaries of the North Atlantic were formally authorized, with members having to consider it case-by-case before deciding to intervene in a conflict. Thus, NATO has control over out-of-area operations and discretionary power to decide whether to get involved in regional crises.

According to the Lisbon Strategic Concept (2010) “Crises and conflicts beyond NATO’s borders can pose a direct threat to the security of Alliance territory and populations. NATO will therefore engage, where possible and when necessary, to prevent crises, manage crises, stabilize post-conflict situations and support reconstruction.”¹³ This excerpt has faced some criticism as NATO's freedom of action could serve as a justification for acting on the political and economic interests of its members rather than on the goal of world stability.¹⁴

Security challenges such as terrorism, cyber-attacks, transnational crimes, natural disasters, political, economic and social instabilities, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other threats linked to energy, maritime and biodefense security were included in the scope of NATO missions and became known as non-Article 5.¹⁵ As Yost explains, there is a relationship of interdependence between the objectives of collective defense and non-Article 5 missions.¹⁶ Even though asymmetric threats and regional crises do not mean a direct aggression to the territories, members justify that they can indirectly evolve and pose security risks. Yost argues that there has been a “deterritorialization of

¹² Kitchen, Veronica M. ‘NATO’s out-of-area norm from Suez to Afghanistan’. *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, v.8, n.2, p.105-117, 2010. Available at <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14794011003760269>>

¹³ NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). *The Alliance's Strategic Concept*. Nov. 2010. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_82705.htm>.

¹⁴ Ringsmose, Jens; Rynning, Sten. “Introduction. Taking Stock of NATO’s New Strategic Concept.” In: _____ (Ed.). *NATO’s New Strategic Concept: A Comprehensive Assessment*. Danish Institute for International Studies. Copenhagen, 2011. Available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/128345/RP2011-02-NATO_web.pdf>.

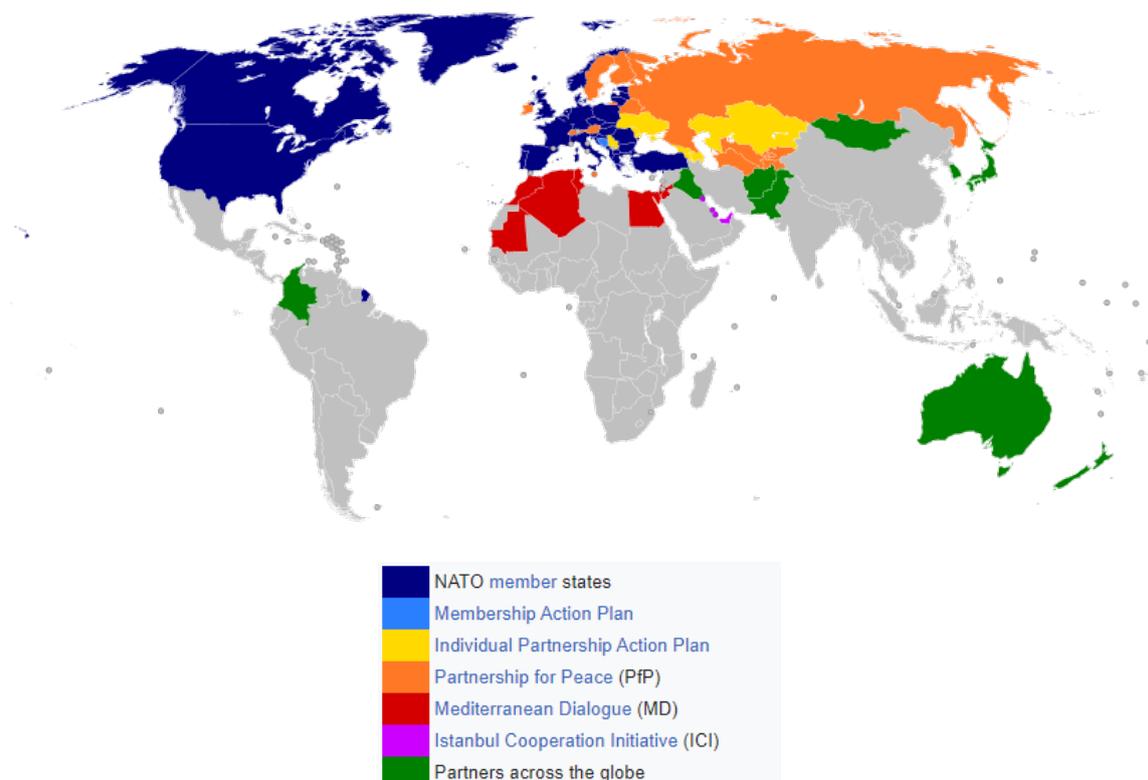
¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Yost, David S. “NATO’s evolving purposes and the next Strategic Concept”. *International Affairs*, v. 86, n. 2, p. 489–522, Mar. 2010. Available at: <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2010.00893.x/abstract>>

the alliance's collective defense mission".¹⁷ The organization, once limited to the “static, reactive and territorial” nature brought by Article 5, assumes a flexible and multifaceted attitude to the dynamics of action. Therefore, NATO takes on global responsibilities and influence and transforms itself in a collective security organization.¹⁸

Besides recognizing the new security threats in the post-Cold War environment, NATO has also developed partnerships with non-member countries. Today, NATO’s “global partners” include Australia, Colombia, Iraq, Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan. Until the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan, that country was also included as a global partner. While partnerships with Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan is related with NATO’s direct involvement in this area, partnerships with the four Asian countries - Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand – can be understood within the context of the rise of China. In that sense, Colombia occupies a unique position.

NATO partnerships



Source: Wikimedia

¹⁷ Ibid.; also Ringsmose, Jens; Rynning, Sten, 2011.

¹⁸ Orfy, Mohammed M. *NATO and the Middle East: The geopolitical context post-9/11*. London: New York: Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics, 2011, pp. 91- 108.

Perspectives of regional actors

Before the agreement with Colombia, only two countries in Latin America had formally partnered with NATO: Argentina and Chile, during the intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with Argentina also participating in the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. While these partnerships with Argentina and Chile can be comprehended in the context of the immediate post-Cold War environment of the 1990s, NATO's partnership with Colombia is more a product of the post 9-11 context. While US closer military involvement in the country began in the year 2000 with the "Plan Colombia", Colombia became part of the Bush's administration "Global War on Terror" after 9-11, even though the terrorist threat had no relationship with Islamic-based terrorism. Moreover, the European Union has been intensely involved in the negotiations between FARC and the Colombian government that led to the signature of the Peace Agreement in 2016. This closer collaboration with both the United States and the European Union is undoubtedly a major reason why Colombia has been the first (and so far, the only) Latin American country to have established a partnership with NATO.

The reactions in the region to the NATO-Colombia agreement can offer a good insight in the kinds of problems NATO may face in trying to strengthen its relationship with other Latin American countries. When the Colombian government announced in 2013 it would seek a cooperation understanding with NATO, there was a considerable pushback from governments in Latin America. The negative reactions came not only from the usual "Bolivarian" suspects such as Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela, but also from Brazil, which has historically sought to limit the involvement of extraregional powers in South America while keeping cordial relations with the United States. The latest Brazilian National Defense Strategy (2008) and Defense White Paper (2012), indicates that the country seeks to strengthen maritime defense policies, modernize its military arsenal, establish aerodrome ship construction projects, conventional and nuclear submarines and radars, satellites and patrol vessels.¹⁹ NATO's presence thus was seen as a mechanism for US foreign policy to legitimize its operations abroad and is also understood as a tool to access natural resources of the seabed, undermining Brazilian interests in building a transatlantic community and becoming an actor at the regional and global level. At the UNSC conference, the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antônio Patriota exposed

¹⁹ Brazil. Ministro da Defesa. *Defense White Paper*. Brasília, 2012. Available at <https://www.defesa.gov.br/arquivos/estado_e_defesa/livro_branco/lbdn_2013_ing_net.pdf>

Brazilian discontent: “*We are still concerned that NATO may be seeking to establish partnerships outside of its defensive zone, far beyond the North Atlantic, including in regions of peace, democracy, and social inclusion that do not accept the existence within that space of weapons of mass destruction.*”²⁰

Contrary to Brazil, which, except during the brief Bolsonaro-Trump interregnum, has had a fairly stable position regarding the role of NATO in South America, Argentina has presented different positions vis-à-vis NATO. During the government of Carlos Menem, there was an interest in making Argentina a member of the Alliance. Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella visited the organization's headquarters in Brussels and in the following year held a seminar on global security issues inviting high-level officials from NATO. In 1998 the country sent troops and participated in the NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Argentine involvement in Kosovo meant a high degree of interaction with NATO, with an Argentine officer as a liaison at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). In 1999, President Menem sent a letter to Bill Clinton and the North Atlantic Council (NAC), expressing interest in formally joining the Alliance. This position would give Argentina a counterbalance to the advance of Brazilian power in the region and a greater voice in the negotiations with England on the Falklands Islands. However, NATO refused Menem's request, since accession would mean reforming the Washington Treaty delimitation to the North Atlantic countries.²¹ In Néstor Kirchner's government (2003-2007), relations with NATO lost priority. This posture was closer to most Latin American countries at the time and it was reaffirmed in 2014 when the Cristina Kirchner administration saw NATO's presence as an instrument of British foreign policy towards the Malvinas.²²

²⁰ qtd. in Abdenur, Adriana E.; Souza Neto, Danilo M. de. *Brazil's Maritime Strategy in the South Atlantic: The Nexus Between Security and Resources*. South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), Johannesburg, n. 161, Nov. 2013, p. 6. Available at: <<https://www.saiia.org.za/occasional-papers/463-brazil-s-maritime-strategy-in-the-southatlantic-the-nexus-between-security-and-resources/file>>

²¹ Reficco, Ezequiel. “Argentina como aliado extra-OTAN de los EE UU: los factores detrás de la alianza”. *Revista CIDOB d' Afers Internacionals*, [S.l.], n. 42, 1998. Available at: <<http://www.raco.cat/index.php/RevistaCIDOB/article/view/28094>>

²² EFE. “Malvinenses respondem Cristina Kirchner com ironia”. *Folha de São Paulo*, São Paulo, 03 abr. 2014. Available at: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2014/04/1435572malvinenses-pro-reino-unido-respodem-cristina-com-ironia.shtml>>

Argentinean Troops salute as they say farewell to KFOR - 5 April 2007



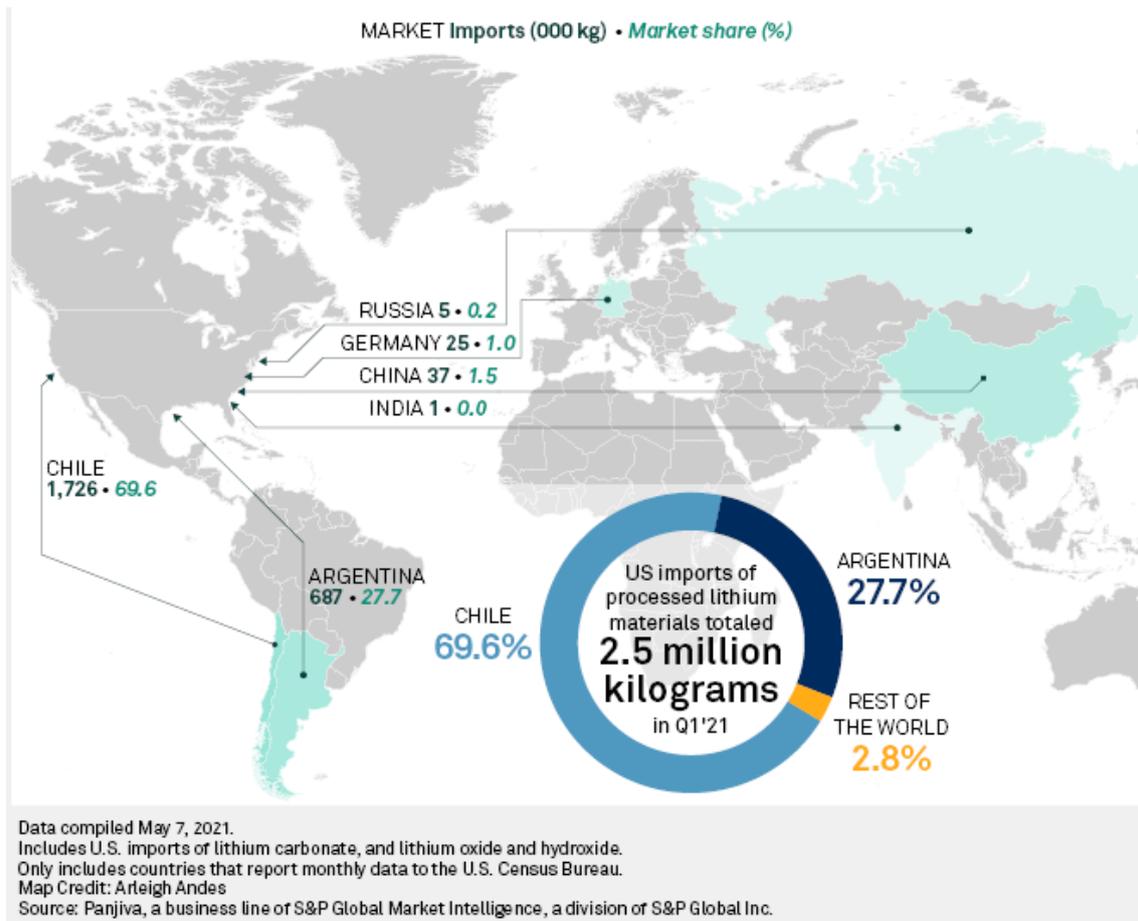
Source: KFOR Media Library

Main factors of engagement

One major reason why Latin America has strategic value are its vast natural resources, particularly in the energy field. For example, Mexico and Colombia are among the top 5 sources of US petroleum imports.²³ The so-called South America's "lithium triangle" – Argentina, Bolivia and Chile – has massive lithium reserves, an increasingly important resource given the growing demand for lithium-ion batteries for plug-in electric vehicles. Nearly all the processed lithium materials imported by the United States come from Chile and Argentina alone.

²³ EIA (U.S Energy Information Administration). *This Week in Petroleum*. 2017. Available at: <https://www.eia.gov/petroleum/weekly/archive/2017/170405/includes/analysis_print.php>.

Q1'21 US imports of processed lithium materials



For NATO European allies though, Latin America’s strategic importance goes beyond natural resources, and it is greatly related to their overseas territories. Since the period of the British empire, strategic points in the South Atlantic region such as the Falkland Islands, St. Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha, South Georgia, South Sandwich have been incorporated into the British jurisdiction. These territories serve as military logistical bases for the economic exploration of natural resources and scientific research. The Falklands Islands, according to Dodds, are among Britain's top strategic priorities and are considered ‘strategic gateways’ in the South Atlantic. This archipelago contains a Royal Air Force Mount Pleasant military base which involves modern fighter-bomber Typhoon.²⁴

²⁴ Dodds, Klaus. “Consolidate! Britain, the Falkland Islands and wider the South Atlantic/ Antarctic.” *Global Discourse*, v. 3, n. 1, p.166-172, mar. 2013. Available at: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2013.804767>> and Dodds, Klaus. “The Falkland Islands as a ‘Strategic Gateway’”. *The RUSI Journal*, v. 157, n. 6, p.18-25, dez. 2012. Available at: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2012.750882>>.

To a lesser extent, France projects its influence in the South Atlantic through the overseas department of French Guiana. Since 1964, satellites have been launched into space by the Guyana Space Centre in Kourou. In 1975, France in partnership with the European Space Agency encouraged the launching of satellites in that territory, ensuring Europe's access to space. The base is enhanced by modern Souyz and Vega rockets. According to Silva, both French and British Overseas Territories help maintain control over the region and could serve as a basis for future NATO operations in the South Atlantic.²⁵ For Portugal, the South Atlantic resurfaces as a strategic area for the goal of energy autonomy. The country seeks to re-establish ties with ex-colonies through regional cooperation agreements.

Guiana Space Center



Source: Arianespace

²⁵ Silva; Antonio Ruy de Almeida. “O Atlântico Sul na Perspectiva da Segurança e da Defesa”. In: Moraes, Rodrigo Fracalossi de. (Org.). *Brasil e a segurança no seu entorno estratégico: América do Sul e Atlântico Sul*. Brasília: Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, 2014, p.199-213. Available at: <http://ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21592>.

Presence of external actors

The growing presence of China and Russia in Latin America is a noteworthy trend in the last few years. During the past decade, the trade between China and Latin America has increased more than twenty times, with China replacing the United States as the top trading partner for several countries in the region, such as Brazil. Since 2017, a number of Latin American countries have joined China's Belt and Road Initiative, and Beijing formalized Latin America as "an important natural extension of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road."²⁶ While the four largest economies in the region – Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico – have not formally joined the initiative, they all have bilateral cooperation agreements with China and are host to Chinese infrastructure projects. Of these four countries, Argentina is the closest to signing an agreement, which would make it the twentieth - and the largest - country in Latin America to join the Belt and Road Initiative. The expansion of Chinese economic presence in Latin America has also strategic implications. According to Duarte, "the South Atlantic for China is another key element in its strategy of securitizing energy supply, as in other regions of the world such as the Middle East or Central Asia".²⁷

Unlike China, Russia has abundant reserves of energy and minerals. The difficult access and high costs of exploring reserves in the Arctic and eastern Urals lead the Russians to pursue an economically viable option.²⁸ Operating costs in Africa and other areas of the South Atlantic are advantageous. While China's presence in Latin America relies heavily on economic power, Russia's presence has a more evident military aspect. The US Southern Commander (Southcom) John Kelly said that "it has been three decades since we last saw this type of high-profile Russian presence."²⁹ Russia has encouraged bilateral trade and the sale of military equipment in the region. After the conflict in Georgia in 2008, Russia sent bombers with nuclear capability to Venezuela. A month later, four Russian ships were sent to joint activities with the Venezuelan navy. In 2013,

²⁶ Wang Yi, "The Belt and Road Initiative Becomes New Opportunity for China-Latin America Cooperation," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, September 18, 2017

²⁷ Duarte, Paulo. "China's incursions in Latin America and the South Atlantic". *Brazilian Journal of International Relations*, Marília, v. 5, p. 97-123, jan-abr. 2016, p. 113. Available at: <<http://www2.marilia.unesp.br/revistas/index.php/bjir/article/view/5944>>.

²⁸ Giles, Keir. *Russian Interests in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College, 2013, 51p. Available at: <http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/pub1169.pdf>

²⁹ Farah, Douglas; Reyes, Liana E. "Russia in Latin America: A Strategic Analysis". *Prism*, v.5 n.4, p.101-117, 2015, p. 112. Available at <http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_54/Russia%20in%20Latin%20America.pdf>

Russian bombers carrying nuclear warheads flew over the Colombian island of San Andrés to Venezuela-Nicaragua, which irked the United States.³⁰ In 2014 and 2015, the Russian defense minister's visit to Venezuela was aimed at accessing the ports and aerodromes of the territory and the installation of permanent bases for logistics.³¹

China's infrastructure projects in Latin America



Source: Inter-American Dialogue

³⁰ Helbig, Robert; Lasconjarias, Guillaume. “Winning Peace and Exporting Stability: Colombia as NATO’s next Global Partner?”. *NATO Defense College*, Rome, n. 138, May 2017. Available at: <<http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1056>>

³¹ Farah; Reyes, 2015

In 2014, Putin's 2014 tour in Latin America also included Mexico and Brazil, which have not historically has been as close to Russia as other states in the region. In 2017, Brazilian President Michel Temer visited Russia to negotiate a series of acts including: International dialogue between their respective foreign ministries, an agreement between these two ministries from 2018-2021, a memorandum of understanding between respective ministries regarding trade, and regarding tariffs between Brazil and the Eurasian Economic Union. Brazil has engaged in discussion with Russia and China via the BRICS forum, which also includes India and South Africa. Since 2018, however, there has been few advances in this dialogue, as Bolsonaro's foreign policy has not given much importance to it.

Vladimir Putin and Michel Temer, June 2017



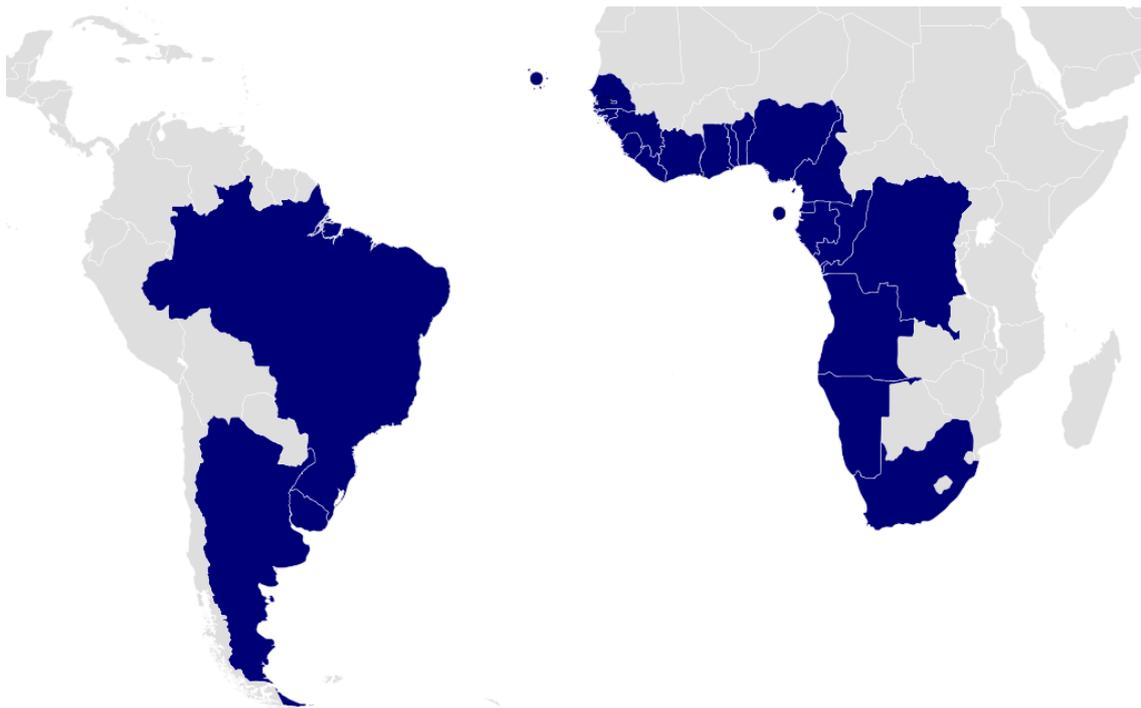
Photo: Sergei Chirikov/EFE

Challenges for NATO

The reaction surrounding the agreement with Colombia is a good indicator of the challenges facing NATO's relations with Latin America. Even Latin American nations historically friendly to the United States, most notable Brazil, remain wary about military ties with the Global North. The historic of European colonialism and, most importantly,

of US interventionism during the Cold War, still lingers in the mind of political elites in the region. Again, this is not a problem restricted to the usual “Bolivarian” suspects, but a much broader phenomenon. For example, when the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZOPACAS) was relaunched in 2007 after a period of stagnation in the 1990s, the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time claimed that: “If we don’t take charge of Peace and security in the South Atlantic, others will. And they will not do it the way that we want: with the vision of a developing country that rejects any colonial or neo-colonial behavior.”³² ZOPACAS’ internal meetings explicitly advocated a need to counterbalance the influence of extraregional actors such as NATO that could want to provide security in the South Atlantic in accordance to their own principles. In that context, the reactivation of the US Fourth Fleet in 2008, which was inactive since the Cold War, was looked upon with suspicion in South America.³³

ZOPACAS countries



Source: Wikipedia

³² qtd. in Abdenur, Adriana E.; Mattheis, Frank; Seabra, Pedro. “An ocean for the Global South: Brazil and the zone of peace and cooperation in the South Atlantic”. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, v. 29, n. 3, p. 1112–1131, Nov. 2016, p.1124. Available at: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2016.1230592>>.

³³ Saint-Pierre, H. “La Activación de la IV Flota de los Estados Unidos y las hipótesis evitables”. Lima: IDEPE, 2008. Available at: <<http://goo.gl/CBpDZJ>>.

One important factor to highlight here is that the creation of ZOPACAS in 1986, rather than a product of Cold War mentality fearing Soviet involvement, was a product of the transformation in the perception of South American countries regarding the South Atlantic space because of the Falklands/Malvinas War. Even though Argentina was the aggressor, both Buenos Aires and Brasília concluded that the actual threat to the South Atlantic region came not from the Soviets but from the Western North Atlantic powers. The Argentinian-British conflict - and the support given by the United States to the United Kingdom - changed the perceptions in the South Atlantic countries and promoted a true realignment of security ideas in the Southern Cone as the countries in the region came to the conclusion that they could not count on hemispheric solidarity in matters of international security. With the notable exception of Colombia, NATO relations with countries in South America are still viewed with a relatively high degree of suspicion and, even more than that, as a potential security threat. Overcoming this distrust is perhaps the greatest challenge NATO faces in its relations with countries in Latin America in general, and in South America in particular.

Recommendations for NATO

While the case of Colombia demonstrates the potential pitfalls of NATO involvement in Latin America, it also offers a model of possible areas of cooperation. Faced with a history of irregular warfare and drug trafficking, Colombian military has gained experience in demining, explosive weapons and air policing. These are useful skills to NATO in similar situations of civil war in other locations. In fact, Colombia has provided demining training to NATO countries and partners through Colombia's International Demining Center (CIDES) participation in the network of NATO Partnership Training and Education Centers (PTEC). At the same time, intelligence sharing between NATO and Colombia may help to combat transnational threats, particularly those related to drug trafficking. The three largest producers of cocaine in the world – Colombia, Peru and Bolivia - are located in South America. The drug produced in these countries are transported to the United States, via Central America, and Europe, via West Africa. Drug dealers have been using increasingly sophisticated methods of transportation, such as “narco submarines”. NATO's collaboration with Colombia may strengthen its capabilities to combat drug trafficking which is not just a domestic issue

but a truly transnational one that affects not only Colombia's neighbors but also Europe and the United States.



Nevertheless, following the “Colombia model” when approaching other countries in Latin America may not be a workable strategy. In fact, given Colombia's history of over two decades closely collaborating with the United States in combating cartels and left-wing insurgent groups, Colombia may indeed be a unique, unrepeatable, case for NATO. Indeed, one could date the close bonds between Colombia and the United States to 1948 when Bogota hosted the conference that created the Organization of America States. Colombia was the only Latin American country to join US troops in the Korean War. Common talks between the two countries in dealing with drug-trafficking had been happening at least since the 1980s, even though the Plan Colombia came into being in the year 2000. As mentioned above, the pattern in Latin America in general, and in South America in particular, is of wariness toward too close military collaboration with the United States and, by extension, with NATO. While some particular administrations may be more or less inclined to a closer relationship with the United States, given the extended period of time necessary to formalize any cooperation agreement and the need for Congress approval in many cases, relying on temporary government configurations is not the best approach.

Any strategic approach with Latin America, should take into consideration not temporary governmental configurations but fixed geopolitical realities. In that sense it

would be useful not to treat Latin America as a coherent entity but as three distinct subregions. First, there are Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean which are in fact North Atlantic countries. Second, there are the countries in the northern part of South America: Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Suriname, Guyana, and Venezuela. Finally, there are the Southern Cone countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. Attempting to develop a cooperation scheme with Latin America while disregarding this reality is most certainly doomed to fail.

A better approach would be following a logic similar to the one that led to the creation of the Mediterranean Dialogue, which includes Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. A “South Atlantic Dialogue” including countries in the Southern Cone of South America together with West African countries on one hand, as well as a “Caribbean Basin dialogue” on the other, would perhaps be a more proper framework than a “Latin American Dialogue”. As a matter of fact, NATO already has conducted joint military operations in Cape Verde, Ghana and other African coastal countries. It has performed activities integrating the regional defense and security system such as training, destruction of obsolete arsenal, monitoring missions, military modernization and military structures. The Alliance has been engaged in several sectors in the South Atlantic: energy and maritime security, civil emergency, natural disasters, drug trafficking, combat to armed groups. It has become a tool for strengthening the members' military and political presence in that area. However, the organization does not yet demonstrate a unified strategy towards the region as it is currently focused on the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Black and Baltic seas.

One possible route for NATO's collaboration with countries in South America could be using ZOPACAS as a starting point. At the moment, ZOPACAS is not an established organization with clear and well-defined objectives but rather a loose framework for dialogue and cooperation between countries in the South Atlantic. Approaching countries in the Southern Cone in the context of ZOPACAS has the advantage of giving a more multilateral structure to a common dialogue including countries in the Atlantic African coast, which seem to be more willing to cooperate with NATO countries than their counterparts in the other side of the Atlantic. The South American countries of the Pacific coast other than Colombia – Ecuador, Peru, Chile may either be incorporated in a South Atlantic Dialogue or be included in some other regional framework.

Moreover, any kind of future cooperation between NATO and Latin American countries should take into consideration not just the specific geopolitical reality of the region, but the changing configuration of the international system as well. For the first time since the independence of the Latin American states, there is an actual and present threat to the historical US and European hegemony in the region. The fact that China has become the major trade partner for a number of South American nations, including Brazil, Chile and Peru, is a clear indication that advanced western economies are quickly losing ground to China in Latin America. In addition, a number of countries in the region have joined China's \$1 trillion investment initiative known as Belt and Road. Besides China, Russia and even India are strengthening ties with Latin American countries. In other words, the current strategic environment in the region is far different than it was only a decade ago. This is can be both a threat and an opportunity for NATO.

Conclusion

Even though the South Atlantic appeared for the first time on the NATO security agenda in the 1970s because of growing Soviet projection of power in the region, NATO remained limited to the commitment of collective defense and the geographical nature of the North Atlantic. Therefore, the organization only provided resources, monitored activities, served as a consultation forum and participated in contingency plans of the region. In the current scenario, greater NATO involvement in the South Atlantic has only been possible after the transformations of the capabilities and structure that formalized out-of-area missions and led it to assume global responsibilities. The latest Strategic Concept (2010) established that no matter where or when a threat emerges, if it compromises the security of its members, NATO will decide on a case-by-case basis whether to intervene. Geopolitical interests at stake of the members instrumentalize a Global NATO to impose a security architecture according to its pattern, repel the growth of other possible powers and influence regional political decisions.

There are three main factors for NATO involvement in the South Atlantic. First, in the face of a possible future energy crisis, this area emerges as promising given its abundance of mineral and energy reserves. Second, typical security threats in that area - such as piracy, armed groups, drug trafficking - along with a precarious regional defense system, may serve as a justification for NATO greater involvement in the South Atlantic.

Finally, the growing presence of extraregional actors such as Russia and China could undermine the interests of NATO members in the region. In addition, the discussion about the Atlantic Basin Initiative project and recent formalization of the partnership with Colombia indicate that the South Atlantic seems to assume relevance in the national agendas.

The issues advanced in this article raises some questions for the future: Will NATO continue to play a limited role in the region, or will it evolve as a more interventionist mechanism in the decades to come? Will the South Atlantic be recognized as a vital area and incorporated into the NATO's next Strategic Concepts, with the consequent development of a specific strategy for the region? Considering that the factors listed in this paper tend to become more salient, a positive answer to these questions seems likely. We hope future studies can shed light on this important issue for international relations.