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# UNASUR, Brazil, and the South American defence cooperation: A decade later

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329201700212>

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 60(2): e012, 2017

## Abstract

UNASUR and its Defence Council (SADC) were created under a promising scenario of regional cooperation. Almost ten years later, a growing demand for regional cooperation arises, facing, however, low levels of political willingness from local governments. Through the lenses of structural and neoclassical realism, this paper suggests that the lack of support by governments, especially the Brazilian one, due to a change in how domestic ideas are developed, and a transformation in the regional balance of power, have contributed to these institutions' quick obsolescence.

**Keywords:** UNASUR; South American Defence Council; Defence Cooperation; Brazil; Neorealism; Neoclassical Realism.

Received: May 30, 2017  
Accepted: August 11, 2017

## Introduction

South America has experienced significant political changes since 2015, with changes in government having taken place in Argentina, Brazil, and Peru. In the near future, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia will also undergo presidential elections while the prospects of the Chavismo in Venezuela tend to become even more critical as governance is under severe stress. A new political environment is gradually emerging on the subcontinent, directly challenging most of the underpinnings of the regional political and institutional framework set up in the previous decade to embrace and foster security and defence initiatives at the regional level.

Since its inception, the South American Union of Nations (UNASUR) has been the most important institutional framework for political dialogue on security matters on the subcontinent, in accordance with its vocation and with the mandate envisaged in the 2008 Brasília Treaty. Even though the need for a genuine South American institutional framework for such a dialogue had been widely recognized, and the creation of the South American Defence

Council (SADC) hailed as a major step towards regional cooperation in security and defence matters, the fact that the SADC embraced consensus as a primary criterion for decision-making, while at the same time lacking binding decision-making powers, was perceived as a significant potential constraint if regional stability was to be severely undermined and regional action was deemed an imperative. If, on the one hand, those choices reflect a pragmatic assessment of the political conditions that should be acknowledged and met to allow the very existence of the SADC, on the other, they also imply severe restrictions on its entitlements to act, which confirms its vocation as a dialogue forum rather than as a decision-making and operative body.

Even if a positive performance of the SADC during its first four/five years might be alleged, the changes in the political landscape which South America has experienced since 2014 have directly affected the SADC and its potential dialogue and operative functions. Our hypothesis is that this is a result of both the change in the regional balance of power, and the lack of domestic political willingness from local governments, especially from the Brazilian government, to advance the SADC's institutional operations.

Our basic argument is that while there is a growing demand for regional political dialogue and cooperation on defence issues, there has not been enough domestic political willingness and incentives to provide the SADC with the necessary resources and capabilities to meet that demand. Such gap can be explained, tentatively, by the prevalence of different and often competing views among member countries as to the object and the desirable scope and forms of regional cooperation, and with regards to the weight they expect it to have in their respective policies and strategies of security and defence. We suggest that this might be the result of the change in the regional balance of power constraints after the beginning of the Brazilian economic and political crises from 2014 and onwards. Regional structural changes were followed by domestic political turnarounds on the regional security and defence cooperation prospects, as both political and ideological cleavages between new governments in key countries like Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and their respective predecessors, in addition to the predominantly inward-looking perspectives of others like Colombia, Bolivia, and Ecuador, contribute directly to deepen conceptual cleavages and political gaps regarding a regional security and defence agenda.

The key argument to explain such changes rely on the analysis of the Brazilian role towards UNASUR and the SADC. As a former regional hegemonic candidate, from 2008 to 2013, Brazil's role was quintessential for the creation and positive results of such regional institutionalizations. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Brazilian economic and political crises in 2014 led to a quick political retrenchment, inducing UNASUR and the SADC with institutional and political weaknesses.

This argument takes into account not only the degree of political willingness of national governments in fostering regional security and defence cooperation; it also envisages the political and economic conditions in which policy priorities in those realms – and the importance to be granted to regional cooperation within them – are defined at national levels. The worsening of economic conditions in most South American countries has not only had a great impact on security and defence budgets but also on the willingness of governments, – especially that of

Brazil – to foster collective initiatives, thus favoring the focus on bilateral efforts on specific and more prominent security issues at that level.

To test these hypotheses, the first section of this article will present the theoretical tools to explain regional defence and security cooperation from an offensive realist approach (Rezende 2015). This section will also suggest how structural constraints lead to domestic political responses as seen from a neoclassical realist approach (Kitchen 2010; Taliaferro *et al.* 2009). The second section will present a brief review of the assessments of the performance of the SADC. The third section focuses on the agenda of the SADC, and the fourth provides an analysis of the factors arising from national political contexts, focusing on Brazil, that restrict the incentives for stronger regional defence cooperation.

## Offensive Realist theory on defence cooperation and neoclassical realist theory on systemic pressures and domestic ideas

The usually pessimistic approach of International Relations realist theories commonly suggests that cooperation on security and defence issues happen in balancing alliances, against a common threat (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001). However, Wilkins (2012) points out that since the end of the Cold War, new security alignments in peaceful times have differed from the traditional alliance patterns suggested by realism. Wohlforth (1999; 2009) and Diniz (2006) also hold that unipolar systems favor multilateral relationships.

Based on this, Rezende (2015) introduces the argument that unipolar regional systems favor security and defence cooperation. Guided by the aim to maximize their gains, states cooperate in defence in a unipolar system because it helps them: (a) to keep, modernize, or even increase, their military capabilities without triggering an arms race or the opposition of the unipolar state; (b) to improve their relative position regarding the unipolar state without spending too much; (c) from the perspective of the unipolar state, to contain new hegemonic candidates through multilateral alignments; and (d) to use institutions to increase their capabilities and state capacity in general.

If states want to use regional defence and security cooperation to maximize their power, increasing their chances of survival, they should take five variables into account: (a) the distribution of capabilities among the units of the system; (b) the kind of cooperation it boosts; (c) the effect of cooperation on state capacity; (d) the design of the generated institutions; and (e) the emulation of successful cases (Rezende 2015).

As the first and most relevant variable, the distribution of capabilities among the states of the region is important because it is not every polarity that advances defence cooperation. Unipolar systems are the best scenario for regional defence cooperation for it is impossible for the other states to balance against the unipolar state. In this scenario, bandwagoning the unipolar state is the best way for second-class states to survive. The same thing happens inside alliances in a bipolar

world. Nevertheless, unbalanced multipolar and apolar<sup>1</sup> systems do not favor defence cooperation. The first can boost competition and encourage regional hegemonic candidates, and the latter can make fragile states even more dysfunctional by sharing sensitive resources. But regional balanced multipolarities, differently from global balanced multipolar systems, can meet the expectations of defence cooperation if it serves the purpose of containing regional hegemonic candidates, by keeping the distribution of power balanced among states, and if it promotes an equitable improvement of states' capacities and capabilities to defend themselves against global and even regional powers (Rezende 2015).

The second variable matters when we analyze the capacity to act alone in self-defence if necessary. Urpelainen (2012) notes that deep cooperation limits states' future options, especially under uncertainty. The more engaged states are on deep defence and security arrangements, the less independent their choices might be in the future. It means that more competitive political scenarios lead to shallow cooperation, and less competitive systems lead to deeper partnerships. This is especially true for military arrangements; the stronger the states' perceptions of fear, the more they should maintain their capacity to act alone if necessary (Rezende 2015).

Derived from the previous one, the third variable, the effect of cooperation on state capacity, matters from an offensive realist perspective because of the sensitiveness of defence issues. Defence cooperation might improve state capacity in an even way. Accountability and the sharing of mutual threats helps to improve capacities between the members of the system without triggering a regional arms race.

The design of the institutions established is also a relevant variable if states seek defence and security cooperation to maximize their gains. According to Jervis (1978), institutions work in accordance with a realist logic if they: increase the gains of mutual cooperation or decrease the costs in case of non-cooperation; reduce defection incentives by decreasing cheat gains or by increasing the costs of non-cooperation; do anything that increases other states' expectations of cooperation. Rezende (2015) adds institutions' relevance when they reflect the distribution of power in a given region.

The fifth and final variable is the realist premise brought forward by Resende-Santos (2007) that states copy other states' successful military arrangements. What should be kept under close attention is whether all the other variables also are the same; an emulation that doesn't meet all criteria might cost one's own existence.

Rezende's (2015) model can explain why UNASUR and the SADC were quickly formed and had such positive results during their first years, when Brazil was on its way to establish its unipolarity in the region. It can also explain why the newborn security and defence regimes halted their positive consolidation and political relevance when Brazil, as the regime maintainer, was engulfed on its worst economic and political crises in decades - which will be explained in

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1 Balanced multipolarities where no state is strong enough to be the system pole, due to the lack of states' capabilities and capacities. That's the case when all regional actors are fragile states and does not have the means to be a power politics in the international system (Rezende 2015).

the next sections. However, in order to associate systemic pressures with domestic changes in South American countries' foreign policies since 2014, it becomes necessary to introduce some theoretical tools from the neoclassical realist approach, which will fit the purpose of connecting systemic and domestic pressures.

Taliaferro *et al.* (2009) claim that in the long run, domestic political dynamics usually reflect the global or regional balances of power. Nonetheless, in the short run, “the policies states pursue are rarely objectively efficient or predictable based upon a purely systemic analysis” (Taliaferro *et al.* 2009, 4). Neoclassical realism then seeks to understand how domestic inputs intervene on leaders' understandings of the balances of power and the connection with their final political actions.

Kitchen (2010) suggests that a grand strategy<sup>2</sup> formation is the key to understanding how systemic pressures perceptions become public policies. The author presents three scenarios in which states might be more driven by their own ideas than by systemic pressures: 1) the more powerful states are, the more likely they are to look for policies based on ideas, 2) when ideas are highly institutionalized or culturally sustained, and 3) when decision-making is highly centered on one person or a small group.

The intervening variable to understand such connections is how ideas are formed within states. According to Kitchen (2010, 130), ideas might intervene domestically in three different ways: “through the specific individuals that hold them; through institutions in which they may become embedded; and through the broader culture of the state”.

Joining Rezende's (2015) and Kitchen's (2010) theoretical contributions, the next sections will analyze how the change in the regional balance of power in South America influenced UNASUR and the SADC's institutional and political dynamics, and how domestic ideas within Brazil served in order to respond to such systemic pressures and change domestic policies related to defence and security cooperation in South America.

## An overview of the performance of the SADC

Official positions and most analyses of the SADC emphasize two basic premises that guided its creation. The first concerns its own nature; it would be a forum for political dialogue and cooperation and not a collective security system or an instance like the United Nations Security Council. Neither would it be a military alliance, nor an instrument of opposition to any country or power (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional de Chile, 2009). The second premise was related to its core objective; it was intended to foster the consolidation of a regional area of peace and security. Therefore, the SADC is often depicted as the outcome of important political convergences

2 “Grand strategy is [...] the level at which systemic and unit level factors converge, where matters of national security are mediated through public diplomacy. When we speak of grand strategy as an analytical concept, we are speaking of that considered set of national policies in peace and war that both set out the goals of the state in international politics and prescribe how a broad range of national resources should be utilized in pursuit of those goals. The study of grand strategy is therefore the study of states' attitudes to the international environment – of how they mobilize which elements of their power in pursuit of which causes in global politics”. (Kitchen 2010, 121)

among South American states regarding the need and the opportunity to forge an institutional framework and regional policy mechanisms representing a sound qualitative step forward within the regional defence landscape. Hereupon, new forms and higher levels of cooperation could be gradually introduced, thus fostering and reflecting a new regional environment that also relied on meaningful domestic political advancements in that same realm.

A relevant objective of political convergences regarding the SADC as a mechanism for cooperation and coordination was the protection of natural resources (Forti 2013; Schandeler 2014). Due to the absence of major conventional threats within the region, and the ongoing developments in the field of international security that favor the prioritization of energy, environmental and food security, the protection of abundant assets of natural resources in South America has become, and is recognized, particularly by the military, as a legitimate and necessary defence objective for South American countries (Medeiros Filho 2011), one that provided common ground and guidance to South American defence cooperation.

However, the early accounts on the genesis and the perspectives of the SADC also highlighted the great heterogeneity and the asymmetries among its members, the diversity of defence policy and institutional frameworks (Comini 2010) and major conceptual differences among them on security and defence issues (Crolla 2010) as factors that would inhibit that cooperation to evolve. Such heterogeneity and differences have led to the absence of shared views on some core political issues of great relevance for defence policy concerns like, for example, the desired type relationship to be maintained with important extra-regional players and with the major powers in particular (Comini 2010).

An example of the difficulties in the debate about the existence – or not – of an arms race within the subcontinent following the implementation of the SADC mandate in 2009 can be found through at least three different proposals that have come up regarding this issue:

[a] Peruvian proposal, recommending disarmament, demilitarization, a non-aggression pact and the creation of a Peacemaking Force; [b] Chilean proposal, recommending a Combined South American Defence Force; and an Ecuadorian proposal, suggesting a code of conduct and mechanisms for reducing military spending (Abdul-Hak 2013, 23).

There is considerable heterogeneity of points of view in the region, albeit South America is considered to be more pacific than any other region in the world (Flemes and Nolte 2010), which highlights the difficulties on the SADC's consolidation. Its deepening – taking into account its current low institutionalization – raises doubts about its efficiency and effectiveness, and exposes the polysemy that marks the concepts of security and defence in the region, as well as the disparities and asymmetries in the social, economic, and military fields that characterize these countries.

These differences may be regarded as natural if one takes into account the differing and often competing views on defence and security amongst South American countries, plus the fact

that the subcontinent had no relevant antecedents of sustained political dialogue and regional concert in defence without foreign powers' presence.

In spite of the progress achieved from the mid-eighties and onwards regarding confidence building measures, this remains a key issue within the regional agenda, which managed to evolve even in the absence of a proper political framework. Confidence building initiatives like the ones set forth by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru in particular were of great relevance as they responded to the widely-shared purpose of definitely overcoming historical bilateral mistrusts and undermining potential conflicts.

It is widely acknowledged that the inherited agenda and advancements provided incentives for raising defence political dialogue and cooperation on both the domestic and regional political agendas. On the other hand, it is also acknowledged that those incentives and opportunities did not translate into greater homogeneity as to policy priorities within the defence realm at the regional level. On the contrary, instead of contributing to overcoming heterogeneity as a feature of South America's security and defence political landscape, it was ultimately reinforced. In such a context, changes introduced by Lula da Silva in Brazil's defence policy, and the leading role Brazil played constituted essential factors in the creation of the SADC (Fuccille and Rezende 2013).

Time was a key factor for the Brazilian leadership in UNASUR and the SADC's inception: capability analysis provides the clear and quick move the country made towards consolidating its unipolarity in South America since the beginning of the century (Rezende 2015). Thus, rather than expressing common visions, the Brazilian initiative has been interpreted as an integral part of the country's intent to become an influential global actor and to consolidate its regional influence. Brazil's behavior met the systemic pressures of the early 2000's in South America. But, besides that, it also reflected the primacy of visions originated in South America advocating greater international autonomy – particularly in relation to the United States.

It is also important to understand how ideas intervened at the unit-level in Brazil. Two of the three conditions suggested by Kitchen (2010) met the political scenario in Brasília: (a) specific individuals held ideas to consolidate Brazilian leadership within its region: President Lula da Silva, his chancellor Celso Amorim, and then Minister of Defence Nelson Jobim, all shared the same ideals; (b) the broader culture of the state during Lula da Silva's years somehow reinforced the optimistic view that it was time for Brazil to finally become a world power (Amorim 2015).

However, these positive assessments of the SADC prospects were tempered by a cautious approach when the major short and mid-term challenges and difficulties it should face were taken into account. There was a high degree of consensus among experts as to what such challenges and difficulties were. Ugarte (2010) and Teixeira Jr. (2011) noted, amongst them:

- (i) the existence of different conceptual frameworks, (ii) the great diversification of orientations of security and defence policies, (iii) the uncertainties associated to the impact of political changes on the SADC as a state policy conceived to deal with strategic interests and (iv) the growing presence of external actors in the region.

To these, other added the different visions about the engagement of the Armed Forces in fighting non military threats (Aránguiz 2013: 73) and the uncertainty as to the role of the SADC in dealing with security issues (Teixeira Jr. 2011: 144).

In fact, we believe that the SADC has not yet undergone a real challenge capable of testing its institutional efficiency and effectiveness. At the same time, the so called *negative agenda* that characterized the US-South America relationship during the *post-Cold War*, centered on drug traffick, terrorism, and other police combats is partially surpassed. In spite of this, the North-Andean and South-Cone Regional Security Sub-complexes still experience disparate dynamics, lacking the articulation and organic character once promised by the role of Brazil in the region (Fuccille and Rezende 2013). As for the time of the closure of this article, the Venezuelan constitutional crisis of 2017 may be the utmost challenge for UNASUR's relevance as a political and dialogue forum amongst South American states.

The SADC had, during its first years (2008–2013), some very important and clear political progresses. Examples of these are the creation of the Centre of Defence Strategic Studies (CEED<sup>3</sup>), in Buenos Aires, the foundation of the South-American Defence School (ESUDE), in Quito, the development of a common methodology for measurement of defence expenditure, and how the Council proved itself to be an important exchange centre for military formation and study. However, ever since 2014, UNASUR's increasing demands did not meet political willingness amongst member states.

It is not the purpose here to provide an exhaustive account of those challenges as conveyed in the literature, but rather to highlight the major security dynamics and trends shaping the global and the regional global strategic landscape that require deeper and more intense forms of regional cooperation and to which the SADC must respond. Besides that, the SADC prospects should not be assessed only on the grounds of the better or worse perspectives of the accomplishment of its core objectives; it is also important to take into account that those challenges provide incentives for member states to sustain political willingness to commit political and economic resources to defence cooperation within the SADC. Nonetheless, the Brazilian crises from 2013/2014 onwards, and unit-level ideational changes in other key South American partners, such as Argentina and Peru, quickly led to institutional uncertainties at UNASUR and the SADC.

This provides the basis for the argument that the inertia – which should not be confused with paralysis, – that has characterized the SADC dynamics in recent years, is closely associated with a persistent gap between growing needs and demands for cooperation in the field of security and defence, on the one hand, and the limited domestic and systemic incentives to foster it, on the other. In order to deepen this argument, a first necessary step is to consider domestic contexts and the incentives for defence cooperation, which is the object of the next section.

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3 Some acronyms used here come from their original names in either Portuguese or Spanish.



## Domestic and regional contexts and incentives to defence cooperation

There are many similarities in terms of major political challenges that the defence sector has faced from the mid-1980's to almost a decade ago in South America: the restoration of democracy, the consolidation of civilian control over the Armed Forces, the countering of the US security priorities in the region and its intent to engage the military in the fight against drug traffic and terrorism, and the adjustment to the *post*-Cold War scenario. Nevertheless, security and defence politics in South America did not provide grounds for sustained regional dialogue, nor defence cooperation initiatives, other than the traditional ones associated with bilateral military cooperation. This fact was expressed in the great heterogeneity and in the political and institutional asymmetries that existed when the SADC was created. Such heterogeneity and asymmetries, plus the economic and social imbalances within countries and among them, were regarded as significant risk factors in the region (Faustino 2011).

If one considers the conceptual dimension, there is no evidence to support the view that there has been a major change as to the diversity of approaches to security and defence in South America (Crolla 2010). Despite the consolidation of the SADC as a defence instrument *stricto sensu*, the armed forces in South America are increasingly exposed to domestic and external pressures to respond to a wide array of security challenges in its broadest sense. Developments observed in Brazil from the end of 2010 and onwards prove that to be true. In the 1990s, Brazil was strongly opposed to discussing the rethinking of the roles of its forces against non-traditional threats, and now it has them actively engaged in countering public security challenges in at least three different states. Peru and Bolivia can be associated with environmental conflicts. Colombia, as a result of the protracted civil war, and Venezuela, due to the growing militarization of domestic politics, also sustain the multiple views South American states have on security and defence. The deterioration of domestic security in face of growing violence associated with ordinary and organized crime has fostered the engagement of the Armed Forces in other tasks than national defence, without such endeavor being part of any sort of broader political dialogue at the regional level. (World Bank 2016)

Another issue that raises heterogeneous responses within the region is the presence of extra-regional powers in South America and in its surroundings. In spite of developments in Colombia's domestic and foreign policies having attenuated the search for intense and active cooperation with the US and its military presence in that country, and in spite of the much more inward looking profile of Venezuela's current government, – particularly if compared to Hugo Chavez's intent to bring Russia and Iran closer to the region, – it cannot be said that either the interests or the presence and influence of great powers in South America have become a major defence concern. The very inexistence of a regional debate on the implications of the growing Chinese presence on the subcontinent is itself an evidence of how far South American countries remain from shared perspectives on extra-regional players in the region.

Another key issue for the Council's agenda is the growing and direct engagement of the military in fighting the non-traditional military threats, represented by traffic in its different kinds and organized crime. Largely different perceptions on these issues among UNASUR member countries are also reflected in the South American Council on the World Drug Problem and the recently created South American Council on Public Security, Justice and Coordination of Actions against Transnational Organized Crime. These later councils were created as part of the effort to restrict the scope of the SADC strictly to defence issues. The fact that non-traditional threats are delegated to specific institutional branches within UNASUR other than the SADC represents a major development, but, at the same time, its treatment is still subject to difficulties derived from highly heterogeneous views among member countries (Zapata Mafla 2014). Borda (2010, 13) also points out that:

[...] current debate has brought to light the differences among various approaches to these issues in the region. To begin with, there is no clear consensus as to the roles that the police and the armed forces should play in fighting drug trafficking. The challenge for UNASUR is to reach an agreement encompassing the positions of those countries where drug traffic and organized crime have not reached the same dimensions they have acquired in countries like Colombia, where the idea of Armed Forces as purely devoted to national defence has blurred; actually they have been given a key role in the fight against domestic insurgency which, in turn, is closely linked to the drug trafficking business.

Competing approaches to fighting drug traffic and organized crime also provide an account of how close, or distant, South American policies are in relation to the US policies, thus defining a spectrum in the extremes of which we can locate the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA) country members, on the one hand, and Colombia on the other. They also provide sound examples of how domestic political ideas reduce incentives to regional cooperation.

In face of such high levels of heterogeneity within UNASUR, a pragmatic stance has prevailed on how to respond to security and defence challenges, that is, exploiting opportunities to work on issues that pose less political resistance - such as confidence-building measures - and that pose no immediate political challenge for cooperation. As defined by Ugarte (2010, 7), "*un grupo de países integrantes de un nuevo bloque o proyecto de integración regional, UNASUR, de sentarse a hablar sobre una cuestión de interés común y sobre la cual nunca habían conversado: la defensa.*"

That does not mean denying the existence of diversities of all kinds: from concepts to ways of understanding defence, strategic interests, capabilities, political trends, connections with the global unipolar state, amongst others.

## Brazil and the SADC: An instrumental view

The political, economic, and social scenarios in South America underwent important transformations during the presidency of Lula da Silva (2003–2010). The motivation of the

economic exchange that prevailed in the 1990s was no longer the only driving force for the dialogue amongst South American states, albeit it remained present. The political dimension and the emphasis on strengthening regional and national autonomies became central on such processes, – also a product of the perception that by deepening the regional debate, it would be possible to meet certain actions that an open regionalism wouldn't properly supply.

The search for the widening of the cooperation from the South Cone to South America has been a central characteristic of the Brazilian Foreign Policy ever since early 1990s.<sup>4</sup> The prioritization given to widening the region is related, amongst others, to the weight of the autonomy on Brazilian foreign actions and the constant preoccupation with maintaining the intergovernmental frame of the regional bodies. From the point of view of the Brazilian South American cooperation strategy, UNASUR's consolidation developed an important role in the articulation of its member states (Mariano *et al.* 2014).

From the Brazilian point of view, the creation of the SADC is linked to the objective of strengthening cooperation in the defence sector and refers to the intention of establishing a counterpoint to the penetration of the US in South America. Amongst other issues, the creation of the SADC would also open the possibility for Brazil to a gain of scale for its defence industry, which lost a significant part of its weight in the 1990's. During the 1980's the Brazilian defence industry was amongst the 10 largest exporters in the world, and the first amongst developing countries (Andrade *et al.* 2016; Mawakdiye 2006; Pim 2007). In 1988, the Brazilian company ENGESA produced about half of the armored vehicles on wheels of the West (Dellagnezze 2008).

According to Villa and Viana (2010), unlike the four basic bodies of the UNASUR structure, the creation of the SADC came specifically from Brazil. In addition, Vaz (2013, 245) points to “the existence of a conscious articulation effort” between the Brazilian National Defence Strategy (END) (Brasil 2008), and the emergence of the SADC. In fact, there can be seen a great convergence between the END and the SADC's 2008 Plan of Action (Consejo Suramericano de Defensa 2009). The END supported Brazilian defence moves at both national and regional levels, also stimulating a greater link between defence and national development. One of the END's main goals was to reinvigorate the country's defence industry. The connection is so clear that the END (Brasil 2008, clause 18) states: “the South American Defence Council [...] will create a consultative mechanism that will prevent conflicts and foster regional military cooperation and the integration of the defence industrial basis, without the engagement of any country from outside the region.”

The END (Brasil 2008) began to operationalize Brazil's national and regional defence policies by incorporating regional cooperation as a relevant part of the Brazilian national development strategy. Such incorporation aims to sustain and expand national economic agents' objectives towards the rest of South America, without taking into account the impacts it might have on

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<sup>4</sup> In 1993, for example, Brazil suggested, in a context of foreign US pressure for the implementation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the creation of a South American Free Trade Area (ALCSA, from the acronym in Portuguese), which would encompass all the twelve independent South American states. Such proposition wasn't put forward.

the construction of more stable and more independent regional institutions. This approach to regional orientation can be observed in Lula da Silva's second term, with the release of the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) in 2007 and the establishment of UNASUR in 2008. Once again, the connection between domestic ideas and systemic responses is very clear. The unipolar state, Brazil, aimed to proliferate its ideas to the whole region.

Most of Brazil's goals in defence had their conception in Lula da Silva's second term, but it was during the first government of Dilma Rousseff (2011–2014) that such actions became real public policies, including the publication of the country's Defence White Paper.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Rousseff not only continued the actions of the previous government but, above all, tried to give a higher priority to defence investments by incorporating the sector into government programs aimed at major projects and industrial incentives, thereby seeking to strengthen the link between defence and national development.<sup>6</sup>

The domestic scenario that met Brazilian defence and foreign policy decision-makers ideas during Lula da Silva's governments found significant support in the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) and in major Brazilian corporations. These companies worked to implement, at both national and regional levels, infrastructure and defence projects described in PAC and in the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA/COSIPLAN) (Brasil 2013a). Such initiatives were only possible given the unipolar status Brazil seemed to be consolidating in its region. By 2007, Brazil's Gross National Product (GNP) was of US\$ 1,3 billion. The rest of all South American states GNP summed about US\$ 1,033 billion (Rezende 2015).

Brazilian initiatives towards the END (Brasil 2008) and the SADC can be divided into two fronts: on the one hand, there were actions to support the national defence industry, on the other one, attempts were made to establish long-term projects.

Most of the actions taken to support the Industrial Defence Base (IDB) were included in Brasil Maior Plan<sup>7</sup> and PAC 2 – both launched in 2011 – as well as in the Articulation and Defence Equipment Plan (PAED) (Brasil 2011a), despite previous moves, such as the National Defence Industry Policy (PNID) in 2005 still under Lula da Silva. Brasil Maior is a set of governmental actions aimed at stimulating industry, innovation, and foreign trade, being divided into three axes: stimulus to production, investment and innovation; defence of industry and the internal market; and stimulus to exports and trade defence (Brasil 2011b).

Officially, the defence sector was incorporated into this Plan on September 29, 2011 through Provisional Measure No. 544 (Brasil 2011c). On March 21, 2012, this PM was converted into Law No. 12.598, which sanctions, “special rules for procurement, contracting, and development of products and defence systems; rules on the promotion of the strategic area of defence”(Brasil 2012b).

5 Here we read: “South American integration remains a strategic objective of Brazilian foreign policy, since the country recognizes the deepening of relations [...] between the South American countries as a fundamental element for socioeconomic development and for the preservation of peace in the region”. (Brasil 2012c, 34)

6 Here is an argument originally developed in Fuccille *et al.* (2015).

7 One of the outcomes of this Plan is *Lei de fomento à Base Industrial de Defesa* (Brasil 2012a).

On March 28, 2013, Decree No. 7.970 regulates the law cited above and paves the way for that in 28 November 2013, twenty-six corporations to be certified by the Ministry of Defence as Strategic Defence Companies (EED). (Brasil 2013a) National companies that fall within this category receive competitive advantages through the Special Tax Regime for the Defence Industry (RETID) and through the Special Bidding Terms (TLE), in addition to easily access to funding programs.

On December 23, 2013, in parallel to the EED certification, Inova Aerodefesa had its final result released. This plan aims to support the expansion of research and innovation in Brazilian companies in the aerospace, defence, and security chains.

Inclusion in PAC 2 eventually provided support for projects that connect to the second front of defence initiatives. These include the Integrated Border Monitoring System (SISFRON), the Guarani Program, the ASTROS 2020 Program, the Blue Amazon Management System (SISGAAz), the Subsea Development Program (PROSUB), The Geostationary Defence and Strategic Communications Satellite (SGDC), the KC-390 Project, and the FX-2 Fighter Modernization Program (Brasil 2013a).

As pointed out, the END of 2008 and the SADC were very connected to the country's foreign policy. Both the document and the regional defence body are linked to the Brazilian search for an extension of the South American projection and the incorporation of the region in the internal discussion around Brazil's national development plans. Based on this incorporation, observing the Brazilian actions in the defence sector, as done here, provides some indications about the government's targeting of the South American dialogue.

The connection between the END and the SADC was clearly rising as in the document's re-edition of 2012 the references to both UNASUR and the SADC emphasized the importance of the regional bodies. The two mentionings of the SADC in the document clarified how Brazil should prioritize regional multilateral forums and promote regional integration in South America through UNASUR and its Defence Council (Brasil 2012d).

What matters to our argument is that Brazilian initiatives indicated the government's willingness to bear the costs of the regional insertion of its major corporations, nourishing a vision of South America as a prior space for expansion of Brazilians companies (Amorim 2015).

This position had some support during the period in which the dialogue was limited to the restricted military cooperation between the Armed Forces of South American countries. However, with the expansion of this dialogue, that has incorporated new players around a broader revitalization of the region's defence industry, it is difficult to stimulate, at the regional level, a strategic sector based mainly on national financing for Brazilian companies. This attitude tended to generate mistrust in the other South American countries, hindering more consistent and deep defence cooperation.<sup>8</sup> This might mean that systemic pressures began to influence policy-makers more than ideas at the domestic level in South American states. As Kitchen's (2010) grand strategy formation method puts it, there was a lack of a powerful actor to coerce ideas, a lack of highly

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8 The data of this imbalance seem to corroborate the perception of what some classify as the *modus operandi* of the "selfish giant". In 2014, the sum of Brazilian exports of defence products to South America accounted for almost 62% of the global total in the area, *i.e.*, 3/5 of the amount exported had the neighbors as final destination. See Brasil (2014) and SIPRI (2014).

institutionalized or culturally sustained ideas, and a stage with multiple decision-makers, making it difficult for ideas to prevail over systemic pressures.

At the domestic level, the shrinking of the importance of UNASUR and the SADC is displayed in a draft of (what should have been)<sup>9</sup> the 2016 re-edition of the END treats regionalism, UNASUR, and the Council. The *an passant* references to both UNASUR and the SADC just state that Brazil seeks to increase its representativeness within both forums, without the previous more clear emphasis on promoting both institutions. There is a clear difference in how the new documents ascribe a minor importance to the previously prioritized institutions (Brasil 2016a, 2016b). It is important to say that such disregard for UNASUR and the SADC began during Dilma Rousseff's second term, and increased after her deposition and the consolidation of Michel Temer's government. These new defence document drafts were mostly written when Rousseff was still the commander-in-chief of the Brazilian Armed Forces, which shows how the lack of political will towards such institutions started under the presidency of Lula's political heiress.

Even if regional integration can work as a strategy to guarantee more voice and strength to the region's struggles in a world of increasing power asymmetries, this cannot eclipse the absolute fragility that such instrumentalization represents for a more comprehensive progress. Thus, the Brazilian commitment to join forces and to use the South American space as a platform for international projection and to guarantee the stability in its surroundings, as well as to seek support on the regional scale in its efforts of articulation of its IDB, seems to have been contemplated only up to 2014 and the upsurge of the Brazilian crisis. Nevertheless, the current process of integration – UNASUR at the forefront<sup>10</sup> – is marked by various ambivalences and inconsistencies, when not open oppositions. Cooperation in security and defence, albeit praiseworthy, will prove to be a “giant on clay feet” if it is not accompanied by a new strategic culture, and its deepening and creation of new institutions in the economic, social, and cultural realm, among others. Finally, the sensitive Brazilian political momentum does not allow us to see clearly the role that is reserved for security and defence cooperation in South America. It is also relevant to point out that the other countries in the region also persistently continue to rely on less institutionalized modalities of regional governance.

## The agenda for cooperation in the framework of the SADC

The more objective way to identify the proposals and assess the progress achieved by the SADC in fostering regional defence cooperation is to consider the conception of the Action

9 The Brazilian political crisis postponed the publication of the draft of the reedition of the Brazilian defence documents (National Defence Strategy, END; National Defence Policy, PND; and the Brazilian Defence White Paper, LBDN) to early 2017. Nonetheless, the documents retain the date of 2016 (Brasil 2016a; 2016b).

10 It is not a useless exercise to remember that UNASUR is articulated with other regional experiences such as Mercosur, and in a more strict and rigorous way it cannot be considered a process of regional integration, being better characterized as a phenomenon of regional cooperation endowed with some mechanisms that connect diverse sectors of its member states.

Plans set forth since 2009 which are organized around four issue areas: (a) defence, (b) military cooperation, (c) defence industry and technologies and (d) education and training policies. The Action Plans have indeed provided a structured agenda and a minimum of guidance for a regular process of defence cooperation, but they are also indicative of the how far and how fast South American countries are willing to move within this domain, taking into account the fact that defence cooperation traditionally has been pursued bilaterally. Forging a regional agenda has been, in this sense, a challenging task from the very beginning. An overview of the succeeding Action Plans reveals that they have laid potential grounds to move beyond conventional areas and forms of defence cooperation. There is no doubt that the agenda comprised by the successive SADC Action Plans embraces new issues, notably in axes 1 and 3 (defence policies and defence industry and technologies) encompassing preliminary levels and forms of cooperation, namely the creation of working groups and the holding of seminars and workshops to identify opportunities and to generate proposals for concrete initiatives. (Consejo de Defensa Suramericano 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016).

On the other hand, even considering the limited background and points of departure to foster cooperation within the four axes, – making it inevitable to take up its initial stages and corresponding tasks, – the inertial trends observed both in the structure and the nature of propositions envisaged in the Action Plans are indicative of how low political incentives have been, either to take up issues of higher political sensitivity, or to move towards deeper forms of cooperation that imply greater political commitment to a regional endeavor. As stated by Soares (2011, 104),

Integration processes still remain, with no deepening efforts. In the areas of security and defence, a meaningful set of initiatives in confidence building has been achieved, what seems satisfactory to most countries. That is, no new daring goals have been set, despite of the creation of UNASUR and its Defence Council.

Although it is not an item on the agenda of the SADC Action Plans, responding timely and effectively to acute domestic or bilateral political crises has been widely regarded as a major positive factor in the assessments of UNASUR's performance over its first six years. It is true that the political dialogue, and the initiatives sponsored by political authorities at the highest levels within the organization to sustain favorable conditions for political stability at the domestic and regional levels, is highly positive as a political asset for the region and UNASUR itself. However, this optimistic assessment must not ignore the fact that, according to Zapata Mafla (2014, 163), “in the majority of cases, the responses to crisis have not followed procedures established for such specific purpose. Rather, the responses by the members of UNASUR have been spontaneous and deprived of regulatory or statutory bases”.

At the same time, from 2015 and onwards, the intent to advance the creation of a conceptual framework for regional defence has been placed on the agenda in a clear contrast with national and regional political developments that have moved many national governments away from that

goal. At present there is a clear and important political gap between formal regional objectives, as defined and pursued in the context of the UNASUR Defence Council, and those nationally defined in particular by governments that came to power in the past two years. Such gap reinforces an inertial trend clearly expressed particularly in the last three Action Plans.

These elements indicate that in the case of the SADC, what has prevailed is neither a sense of strong political willingness to embrace more intense levels of defence cooperation, nor a genuine commitment to such a regional endeavor, but rather a pragmatic choice of avoiding politically difficult, challenging, and controversial issues in order to favor low-cost and short-term opportunities that might provide some limited impulse to it. The more member countries embrace such pragmatic stances, the more the SADC becomes deprived of the possibility of consolidating itself as a politically valued referent to national governments themselves.

## Conclusions

The preceding analysis relies on two basic premises: there is a huge gap between the levels and forms of regional cooperation required by a complex array of domestic and international security and defence challenges, on the one hand, and those actually pursued and achieved within UNASUR and by its Defence Council. On the other hand, this gap can be explained to a large extent by low domestic incentives to grant cooperation a higher profile in the realm of national defence policies, especially in Brazil. Although at first this might be regarded as a contradiction or a paradox, the limited structure of incentives on the part of UNASUR member countries to cooperate provides an important explanation to the inertia that has characterized it and its Defence Council in the past three years.

Our main hypothesis to explain such context relies on two theoretical assumptions: 1) From a systemic approach, relying on Rezende (2015), there was a change in the South American balance of power from 2014 and onwards. If a tendency to consolidate its unipolarity in South America since the early 2000's might be suggested, the Brazilian privileged position became doubtful since the beginning of its economic and political crises, which are still ongoing. Thus, if there were systemic incentives for defence and security cooperation below a unipolar system, these incentives are the opposite in the case of an unbalanced multipolarity. If the Brazilian leadership in South America refuses to fulfill its hegemonic responsibility towards UNASUR and the SADC, – institutions created when Brazil had clear intentions to lead the region, – we can expect the region to work in a more selfish and competitive manner, in accordance with an unbalanced multipolarity system; and 2) domestic ideas influence grand strategy formation, according to Kitchen (2010). The change of governmental perspectives in relevant governments in South America, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Peru, shows that new ideas have given place to those which fomented defence cooperation in the region, changing UNASUR and the SADC's political relevance within the region.



The intent to explore possibilities to move forward in the four basic dimensions of the SADC Action Plans is conditioned by nationally defined factors. These, in turn, express themselves in the continued heterogeneity within the realm of defence and security policies; both in their conceptual frameworks as well as in the priorities and strategies which they embrace to respond to political and strategic dynamics and changes at global and regional levels. More recently, such divisive trends have become stronger due to domestic political developments across the region that have, in turn, contributed to weaken regional security and defence instances like UNASUR and its South American Defence Council.

In such a context, the lack of political guidance becomes a critical issue in defining the prospects of the SADC, and those of regional defence cooperation at large. The present inertial trend that characterizes UNASUR and the SADC itself is, in this regard, the apparent expression of the lack of political willingness to foster defence cooperation relying on the same political and ideological assumptions that underscored their inception a decade ago.

At the same time, there is not an identifiable incentive or driving force powerful enough to reverse that trend in the short term. As previously argued, Brazil played a decisive role in forging the SADC, but its own perspectives towards it have changed dramatically over the course of the past three years, and more clearly so after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. At present, Brazil is not willing to play an active role in strengthening the SADC, and this has been a decisive factor in the shaping of its recent course and of its immediate and midterm prospects. Meanwhile, South America keeps on caught between the status of a nascent and a rising security community, an unsatisfactory status from the perspective of Brazilian political and strategic long-standing interests towards the region.

From a systemic point of view, if South America keeps operating in an unbalanced multipolarity, more self-help and institutional difficulties can be expected towards UNASUR and the SADC. And if domestic ideas that intervene on Brazilian and some key South American states' political debates today succeed in consolidating their policies, defence and security cooperation in South America will keep far away from substantial political and structural achievements in the forthcoming years.

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