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Ten Years of the South American Defense Council: Regional International Security Architecture

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Abstract. The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) completed ten years in 2018 in deep crisis: 6 countries announced suspension of membership in the institution. The aim of this article is twofold: to make a summary of the performance of the Defense Council (CDS) of UNASUR in its ten years of operation, its rise and “fall”; in doing so, seeks to highlight aspects that reveal competition and overlap between the CDS and other processes of institutionalization of defense and international security in the South American region, which reach relative success while being deficient and weakened.

Keywords: CDS; UNASUR; MINUSTAH; defense; cooperation.

[es] Diez años del Consejo de Defensa Sudamericano: arquitectura de seguridad internacional regional

Resumen. La Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (UNASUR) completó 10 años, en 2018, en crisis profunda: 6 países anunciaron la suspensión de la membresía en la institución. El propósito de este artículo es doble: hacer un resumen del desempeño del Consejo de Defensa de UNASUR en sus diez años de operación, su ascenso y “caída”; al hacerlo, busca resaltar los aspectos que revelan la competencia y la superposición del CDS con otros procesos de institucionalización de la defensa y la seguridad internacional en la región de América del Sur, que alcanzan un éxito relativo, al tiempo que son deficientes y se debilitan.

Palabras clave: CDS; UNASUR; MINUSTAH; defensa; cooperación.

[pt] Dez anos do Conselho de Defesa Sul-americano: arquitetura de seguridade internacional regional

Resumo. A União das Nações Sul-americanas (UNASUL) completou 10 anos em 2018 em crise profunda: 6 países anunciaram suspensão de associação no órgão. O objetivo deste artigo é duplo: fazer um resumo do desempenho do Conselho de Defesa da UNASUL em seus dez anos de operação, sua ascensão e “queda”; ao fazê-lo, busca destacar aspectos que revelam a competição e a sobreposição dos CDS com outros processos de institucionalização da defesa e segurança internacional na

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região sul-americana, que alcançam relativo sucesso e, ao mesmo tempo, são deficientes e enfraquecidos.

Palavras-chave: CDS; UNASUL; MINUSTAH; defesa, cooperação.

Sumario. Introduction. 1. UNASUR and the area of defense. 2. The four axes of cooperation in the UNASUR Defense Council: A brief balance. Final considerations. References.

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Introduction

South America has undergone profound changes in the area of cooperation in Defense in recent years. Hemispheric agreements and institutions, such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), continue to play a relevant role in the region; joint military exercises and the participation of several South American nations in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping troops have strengthened and intensified; while new arrangements and institutions were created and developed, such as the establishment in 2008 of the South American Defense Council (Consejo de Defensa Sudamericano, or CDS).

The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) completed ten years in 2018 in deep crisis: 6 countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru) announced suspension of membership in the institution, claiming that the bloc has been adrift (Reuters, 2018a).

Some authors have been diagnosing the reasons for the disbandment of the institution. Victor M. Mijares and Detlef Nolte (2018) point out that UNASUR was the result and the common denominator of different regional projects, led mainly by the former presidents of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez; the authors stress that other countries of the region joined the project with divergent interests. With the political changes in several South American countries, the indefinite suspension of 6 nations from the organization would be a step in the disintegration of the South American project as a geopolitical bloc and relevant actor in the international system. However, the authors emphasize that from the outset UNASUR possessed the germ of its current crisis and its potential self-destruction, due to the lax organization design, the pre-eminence of national autonomies over regional integration and the lack of a supranational institutionality of the bloc, what the authors call a “paradox of autonomy” (Mijares & Nolte, 2018).

Sanahuja & Comini (2018) question whether this disbandment would be a so-called “Sudamexit” or an “empty chair strategy”: the authors argue that rather than a “Sudamexit”, the move seems rather a pressure maneuver by the six countries – in the style of the “empty chair” – to modify the orientation of the block and its decision making.

In relation to these “disintegration” movements, Colombia’s entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a possible distancing of the country from regional organizations is considered a mistake by authors such as Juan

Gabriel Tokatlián (2018). In addition to joining NATO, shortly thereafter, in 2019, Colombian President Ivan Duque announced plans to create a new regional bloc, with the aim of isolating Venezuela; the proposed group, to be called “PROSUR”, would focus on defending democracy and free-market economies (Associated Press, 2019). However, just as there is a risk of extinction and/or creating other institutions, there are also movements towards a possible re-articulation of UNASUR (Oliveira, 2018).

In recent years, several overlapping and competing initiatives and arrangements have been created and operate in the area of defense and international security in South America, which find their materialization in institutions such as, within UNASUR, the South American Defense Council (CDS, for its acronym in Spanish), the Center for Strategic Studies (CEED, for its acronym in Spanish) and the Defense College (ESUDE, acronym in Spanish); and, in the case of the Bolivarian Alliance for Latin American Peoples (ALBA), the School of Defense and Sovereignty. These new arrangements overlap or compete with Hemispheric institutions, fragmenting or complicating hemispheric security and defense architecture, within a context of pluralization of South American integration models.

This proliferation of initiatives and models of regionalization and cooperation, due to their diversity, competition, overlap and superimposed functionality, has been described as a process of “complexification” of international security and defense institutions in South America (Weiffen, Wehner & Nolte, 2013; Villa & Bragatti, 2015). This process has reflected political and ideological pluralization in the region, impacting South American security and defense institutions and architecture, which, in defining regional objectives and responses, seek to differentiate themselves from hemispheric and extra-regional institutions. These initiatives seek to adapt to specific needs, risks and threats, as well as to the interests of self-defense and security promoted by some South American state actors (Villa & Bragatti, 2015).

With an approach based on the concepts of institutional overlap and “regime complexity” and methodology of bibliographical and documentary analysis, the objective of this article is twofold: to summarize the performance of the Defense Council of UNASUR in its ten years of operation, its rise and fall; at the same time, we seek to highlight some aspects that reveal the competition and overlap of the CDS with other processes of institutionalization of defense and international security in the South American region, which reach relative success while being deficient and weakened.

In studying competition and overlapping between UNASUR and OAS, it is argued that regime complexity is an “enigmatic phenomenon”, since it is not very clear why countries seek to form entirely new institutions in areas that are competence of established institutions (Weiffen, Wehner & Nolte, 2013, 2013: 372). UNASUR itself faces competition and overlapping with institutions such as ALBA, which has very similar processes and instruments in the area of security and defense at the subregional level. Many authors have analyzed the proliferation and complexity of overlapping and competing institutions. Weiffen, Wehner & Nolte explain that “international relations scholars have coined the concepts of «regime complexity» or «inter-organizational networking» to study the relationships between institutions that intersect with respect to their geographical domain and/or functional scope” (2013: 372).

The institutional overlap can generate more opportunities for differentiated strategies for the countries of a given region. Among them, the possibility of an *a la carte* use of multilateral cooperation, also offering member states the opportunity to opt out of certain political-institutional arrangements to seek and/or lobby for their political preferences in another institution (Weiffen, Wehner & Nolte, 2013). The formation of a new institution can also be a means to seek to balance power or to exclude a dominant power in the region. The authors point out that the intersection of UNASUR and ALBA can be defined as an “overlap constellation”: while Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia are part of both organizations, ALBA and UNASUR have members that are not part of either organizations (Weiffen, Wehner & Nolte, 2013: 375).

1. UNASUR and the area of defense

The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), created in 2008 in a context of the rise of several popular/populist or left-wing governments in the region (the so-called “pink tide”), is considered to be of low institutionalization and slow evolution (Mijares, 2011; Fuccille, 2014a).

In 2018, completing 10 years, UNASUR is facing its period of greater uncertainty and crisis, as it has been said (Reuters, 2018a). Stagnation and crisis were already visible in recent years, as evidenced by the fact that since 2017, with the departure of the Colombian Ernesto Samper, UNASUR does not have a general secretary (BBC Mundo, 2018). Within the issue of defense, in recent years there has been a profusion of bilateral agreements between South American countries or with extra-regional partners, such as China and Russia, as well as Iran, in the area of military equipment and assistance, which means a drop in the market of US armament countries in the region (Villa & Weiffen, 2014).

There are also elements of a visible inflection in the scope of UNASUR: Bolivia’s appeal to the Court of The Hague – and not to UNASUR – to resolve the issue of its access to the sea, in litigation of its border with Chile; the negotiation between the FARC (Revolutionary Forces of Colombia) and the government of Colombia, where even extra-regional actors took center stage; the participation of Colombia in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and the bilateral dialogue with countries outside the region – notoriously Russia and China –, emphasize the delicate moment that the UNASUR undergoes to develop its potential as a fundamental entity in the solution of these issues.

At the same time, other defense structures have emerged from regional experiences that have a stronger political content, such as the ALBA Defense School, generating a pluralization (or fragmentation) of South American integration processes, at the macro level (for example, MERCOSUR and ALBA). In this sense, the region is going through a process of “complexity” of the international security architecture (regime complexity), with institutions that overlap and compete with each other and cause fragmentation. As pointed out, the complexity, fragmentation and overlap of defense and security institutionalization processes result in the existence of differentiated models of cooperation and integration that, although they may achieve relative successes, are quite weakened (Villa & Bragatti, 2015).

Most processes of South American integration, including MERCOSUR (the Southern Common Market), privilege the union between countries of the region as a form of support to economic development. However, surpassing the economic level, UNASUR aims are to establish actions in multiple instances (multidimensional), represented by its sectorial councils referring to Education, Science and Technology; Economy and Finances; Health; Combat of Drug Trafficking; Energy; Planning and Infrastructure; and Defense. However, the singularity of UNASUR is the primacy of politics (Sanahuja, 2011, 2014; Dabène, 2011). The area of Defense is one of the most advanced in the context of UNASUR, unlike other processes of regionalism that developed in other areas, such as commerce and democracy (Villa & Bragatti, 2015).

The creation of UNASUR, bringing together all the countries of South America (and only them, excluding Central and North America) is a sign of the regional institutional complexity which questions traditional hemispheric institutions, including the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR, for its acronym in Spanish) and the Organization of American States (OAS). We underscore that within the literature about conceptual debates on UNASUR, simplified as follows: UNASUR is a type of regionalism that differs from previous experiences, inasmuch as it goes beyond previous models of “open regionalism” (these privileging the economic aspects of integration), in a form of regionalism conceptualized either as “post-hegemonic”, “post-liberal” and / or “strategic”, and involves several aspects (multidimensionality); in this sense, the centrality of politics, the search for regional autonomy, rather than the economic-commercial aspects would explain/reinforce the institutional “minimalism” of UNASUR, which would be a positive factor for the institution, as well as its weakness and potential for disintegration (Sanahuja, 2014; Bernal-Meza, 2013; Serbin, 2010; Dabène, 2011; Tussie & Riggiozzi, 2012).

However, the search for sovereignty and the “national interest” of the participant countries is a feature of the institutions and processes of regionalism and cooperation in South America. UNASUR, as well as other South American regionalist processes and throughout Latin America, follows an intergovernmental model of association, where sovereign states are the main actors in the formulation and implementation of these same processes. States thus seek to maintain, above the regional vision, the national interest and the preservation of national sovereignty. In that sense, the South American region, as a geopolitical bloc, presents great diversity and complexity. According to Andrés Serbin:

The creation of this South American area has led to the progressive development of a regional network of organizations, forums and various multilateral forums whose profile is not yet clearly defined, but which guides the general guidelines of a process of regionalism with its own characteristics. Some of them refer to the reaffirmation of national sovereignty as a constitutive principle of the Latin American juridical legacy, the reluctance of the South American nations to transfer it for the sake of some supranational legal system and its reaffirmation as an inalienable principle of the Westphalian state emerged in the region with the struggles for independence of the nineteenth century, along with an implicit questioning of the inter-American system (Serbin, 2010: 5-6; author's translation)

UNASUR succeeded in mediating the crisis in the context of the attack by the Colombian Armed Forces against the Colombian guerrilla camp in Ecuador in 2008. The institution also played an important role in the management and control of subsequent political crises, the discussion on the installation and use of Colombian military bases by the USA in 2008-2009; the attempted coup in Ecuador, in 2010; as well as the mediation of the crisis between the opposition and government in Venezuela in 2014, among other situations, demonstrating that UNASUR's actions represent a "differentiated international political subsystem" in the region (Peña, 2009). At the same time, from a functional point of view, UNASUR positions itself as an organization that reproduces similar roles to the Organization of American States and, paradoxically, has the OAS as a model for its operational capacity and legitimacy as a regional organization (Villa & Bragatti, 2015; Weifen, Wehner & Nolte, 2013).

The construction of South America as a region with its own set of rules and conflict resolution regimes is visible in the defense field and this is one of the areas that has been further developed within the UNASUR initiatives. Its main expression is the South American Defense Council (CDS), created in 2008, which represents the core of the defense cooperation regime (Falomir Lockhart, 2013). On the discursive side, the objectives of this institution are to preserve stability in South America, as a zone of peace, and the formation of a South American vision of defense, to identify threats and risks, to coordinate actions and articulate a common position in the international forums (UNASUR, 2008).

No less important is that there is a tension between the institutionalization of South American space itself and the reconciliation of multiple spaces of regional insertion and, on the other hand, the need to provide the institutional spheres with sufficient credibility (Peña, 2009). Conceptually, the process of deepening and implementing an expression of identity and common interests in the South American defense area at the institutional level is complex, in a context where plural perceptions in defense prevail, although this expression is still not very dense and still is in the process of being built. In this direction, the tensions and competition which developed between UNASUR and ALBA, for example, point to a phase of institutional complexity (Villa & Bragatti, 2015).

The CDS avoids entering more emphatically into security aspects, which is almost a paradox due to the fact that the region is heavily affected by actors and non-state and transnational security processes such as drug trafficking, organized crime, smuggling of arms and people, presence of guerrilla or paramilitary insurgent groups, urban violence, among others. In its place, the CDS is restricted to the notion of defense. The CDS also differs from ALBA's defense integration proposal, especially in the concept of collective security assumed by the latter. However, for some authors, such as Héctor Saint-Pierre (2011), the aim at "hard defense" of the CSD is well founded: this would prevent the armed forces of South American countries from being used to solve public security problems and thus focus on national defense.

Regardless of this focus on defense, for example the strong concern with transparency in military spending and the lack of formulations of security concepts such as those of ALBA, the CDS is also functional to the ALBA countries, as Fuccille shows:

The CDS could come to fulfill different designs, with all eventually having something to gain: from the perspective of [...] a Venezuela that, although under the model desired by the commander Chávez, saw it as an important instrument to avoid the encapsulation or even direct action by the US; to the other Bolivarians of the region, Bolivia and Ecuador, wanting to seek guarantees against destabilizing actions of the type that happened with and after the episode of Angostura (Fuccille, 2014b).

However, consolidation of the UNASUR Defense Council faces problems, especially in the continent's regional geopolitical sphere, which would involve the development of a more sophisticated conflict resolution mechanism that is still absent in the CDS, and the potential for conflicts have not been solved. According to Pagliari:

[...] some possibilities for interstate conflict still persist because of border issues not completely resolved. They stand out: between Chile and Bolivia for this to claim their right of exit to the sea; between Colombia and Nicaragua, as a result of the dispute over sovereignty over the archipelago of San Andrés; between Colombia and Venezuela regarding the delimitation of the continental shelf of the Gulf of Venezuela (or Gulf of Maracaibo); Venezuela and Guyana on the Esequibo River basin (Pagliari, 2015; author's translation).

The potential for conflict mentioned above by Pagliari reinforces the objectives of UNASUR and the CDS because one of the main bases of the formation of the Defense Council was the concern of many governments with the possible escalation of conflicts between the neighboring countries. The pinnacle of tension was the attack by the Colombian Armed Forces against the Colombian guerrilla camp in Ecuador, with the invasion of Angostura in March 2008, which resulted in the assassination of Raul Reyes, leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Another reason was the reactivation, also in 2008, of the US Fourth Fleet and the talks of installation of US military bases and radar systems in South American territories, such as Colombia and Peru.

On the other hand, the CDS has introduced an important geopolitical innovation in the hemisphere. Since the formation of the Hemispheric System of security and defense institutions after the end of World War II, it was almost impossible to think of any such structure in which the United States was absent. If we discard the structures generated by ALBA, which, for obvious political reasons, exclude the United States, the CDS is the first Latin American regional defense structure in which the United States has no participation in its formulation or policy-making process. However, the process that led to this result, on the other hand, did not mean a traumatic and conflicting process between South American countries and the United States, in which it also differs from the process that leads to the emergence of ALBA's defense concepts. "It was only possible to erect a structure like the CDS without open confrontation with Washington", according to Fuccille, who argues that the CDS is a process hitherto somewhat consented by the United States (Fuccille, 2014b).

Still, in the view of Saint-Pierre & Montoya (2014), while the CDS did not contemplate creating a military alliance, as proposed by Venezuela, the strategic priority of integration of the defense industries is an adequate way to consolidate confidence and, at the same time, autonomy and self-sufficiency of the region.

On the institutional front, the CDS began to develop a certain growth of a more dense organizational structure in recent years: in addition to the Center for Strategic Defense Studies (CEED), in Buenos Aires, there was also the creation and inauguration of the South American Defense School (ESUDE), based in Quito. Other actions reinforce and stimulate defense cooperation on the continent, such as the definition of Action Plans in the area of security and defense, and the construction of a common methodology for measuring military spending on defense and exchange in military training and training (Fuccille, 2014b).

The CEED is an instance of production of strategic studies, a think tank, whose mission is the generation of knowledge and diffusion of a South American strategic thinking in terms of defense and regional and international security, always on the initiative of the CDS (Frenkel, 2016).

The dynamics of fragmentation of the regional integration processes had its impact reflected in the complexification and overlap of defense institutions in South America, according Villa & Bragatti (2015). The authors note that, at the end of 2008, the South American Defense Council was formalized within the framework of UNASUR; in May 2011, the creation of the ALBA Defense School was formalized. Both processes, according to the authors, reflect and recompose the processes of pluralization of the hemispheric security architecture and fragmentation of the regional integration processes (Villa & Bragatti, 2015), at the most specific and at the broadest level.

Villa & Bragatti (2015) point out that, with a few days apart, the Center for Strategic Studies of UNASUR and the School of Defense of ALBA were inaugurated in 2011, even though there are substantially no differences between the objectives of the two centers. The authors point out that there are, however, conceptual differences between these institutions and the CDS would not replicate ALBA defense mechanisms because it assumes a concept of defense integration and not a forum (as is the nature of the CDS itself). Villa & Bragatti point out that, in 2008, coinciding with the creation of the CDS, ALBA formed a defensive military alliance that includes Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. The agenda of this initiative postulates: 1) a joint defense strategy, articulating the armed forces and intelligence corps; 2) a collective security mechanism; 3) a regional army; 4) a School of Defense. In essence, however, the CSD is a pragmatic forum based on: 1) an understanding mechanism on consultation and coordination in the field of defense and security; 2) a forum for annual meetings of the Armed Forces Major States; 3) a forum for exchange in the area of military education; 4) a mechanism for subregional participation in peacekeeping; 5) a forum for the construction of identities in defense, and a common vision of security and defense, based on specific needs and common interests of the countries of the region (Villa & Bragatti, 2015).

Comparatively, both defense schemes, UNASUR and ALBA, are articulated in a double dynamic of competition and complementation. The discourses of UNASUR and ALBA, with differences of intensity, emphasize in their military objectives regional autonomy in relation to the United States and other powers. On

the other hand, both UNASUR and ALBA seem not only to reject the influence of other powers, but also seek to create their own defense and security alternatives.

In addition, several authors point out the serious limitations of South American defense cooperation initiatives. According to Regueiro & Burzaga (2012), there are no indications in concrete policies that point to a convergence between the countries and the various processes in this space. There are deep differences between participants in relation to core issues, and the basic policy of countries and integration priorities have not changed. There is also a gap between political statements and effective actions of cooperation in Defense, according to Saint-Pierre & Montoya (2014). The authors point to the lack of common doctrine in defense initiatives in South America, where new military doctrines for cooperation in this area have not been elaborated or assimilated and, in general, the strategic designs still anachronistically reflect the expectations prior to the end of the Cold War: “[...] the attitudes that point to regional cooperation in the area of defense are confined to confidence-building gestures, still far from obeying a design consistent with a cooperative process” (Saint-Pierre & Montoya, 2014: 35).

In the next section, we take a brief look at the activities carried out by the CDS in its ten years of operation, stressing several instances in which the Council has taken advantage of/ or replicated other existing and competing initiatives and arrangements in its development and implementation.

2. The four axes of cooperation in the UNASUR Defense Council: A brief balance

The UNASUR Defense Council is a relatively new, incipient, slow-paced initiative that has not yet gone through “trials by fire”, especially in relation to head-banging the interests of extra-regional powers (Fuccille, 2014). To develop its activities in defense cooperation, the CDS has established four main lines of action (or axis): (1) defense policy operations, (2) military cooperation, humanitarian and peace action, (3) industry and technology defense, and (4) training and training. In its first five years, it is possible to notice a relatively positive balance of the entity’s activities, despite criticism from academics, political and military authorities, with what is perceived as vagarosity in the implementation of its resolutions.

The first axis, of Defense policies, is considered the main one in the first editions of the CDS Action Plan. In this axis, the UNASUR and the CDS seek to play a role in the affirmation of a common strategic vision, a regional approach for South American security. Likewise, there is still a debate and disagreement among the different nations about what constitutes threats, priorities and strategic visions. In the analysis of Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro (2014), it can be said that there is a process of regionalization starting of a common framework process and an instance of communication, socialization and learning carried out by the CDS. Some themes are constant, according to these authors, demonstrating their prioritization by the CDS: this is the case of the Working Group for the transparency of the military inventory of the countries of the region, the creation of a virtual communication platform (since 2012), of the working group for the establishment of a regional policy for cybernetic and computer threats, the protection and defense of

natural resources, and the conceptual discussion of threats common to all the South American States.

The implementation and the work developed by the Center for Strategic Defense Studies (CEED) within the scope of the Defense Council is intended to contribute to the definition of strategic approaches in the region and the articulation of a South American defense identity: the studies published by the CEED address the conception of security and defense in the region, observing the diversity of visions and institutional structures existing among the twelve countries, according to Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro (2014).

The CDS intends to build a cooperative defense system; to clearly distinguish public security and national defense; the reach of the armed forces is limited to the response of external threats that endanger territorial integrity and national sovereignty and, therefore, do not resort to them to respond to internal and / or transnational threats (Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro, 2014).

A study prepared by CEED also addressed the protection of natural resources and biodiversity of the region, considered “strategic”, in which one of the main threats in the region, being rich in resources, is related, according to Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro, to attempts of foreign control over oil, water and mineral resources and agrifood and, therefore, that could be subject to conflicts. This “geopolitics of natural resources” suggests that UNASUR seeks to build an integrated geopolitical space that guarantees access and control of its members to potential extra-regional threats (Bruckman, 2011; Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro, 2014; Forti, 2013; Fuccille, Bragatti & Telarolli, 2017).

The publication of the South American report of defense spending opens a new path of institutionalization, as member countries meet and have a clear notion of their budgets and expectation of the annual report of their defense costs (Fucille, 2014; Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro, 2014; Saint-Pierre & Montoya, 2014).

The second axis of the Plans of Action, on military cooperation, humanitarian actions and peace operations, seeks to ally the regional experiences of combined and joint operations through common training, and seeks a form of joint action and shared use of mechanisms and existing inter-allies exercises, through joint training, with the aim of diminishing the discrepancies of the military doctrines between the South American Armed Forces (Rezende, 2013).

The experience shared among several South American nations in sending troops to peacekeeping missions for the United Nations was used as a factor to potentiate the exchange of information and confidence measures among the countries of the region. The participation of South America in peace operations is not recent: since the founding of the UN, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay have sent military observers for missions of the organization in various parts of the world. However, starting in the 1990s (and especially after the 2000s), this participation reached unprecedented levels, constituting the region with the greatest contribution in UN peace missions. These South American countries identified that participation in UN peace missions is an integral part of the commitment to maintaining peace and international security (Souza Neto, 2013).

Throughout history the South American countries had different motivations to act in peace missions. The “ABC + U”, that is, the states of the Southern Cone: Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and, to a lesser degree, Chile, are the most committed to the peace operations of the UN, with the Andean states beginning to follow these

steps (Souza Neto, 2013). These countries have put aside the resistance of the past, which in a certain way associated international missions with military interventions carried out by the US in the previous decades (Kenkel, 2013).

This perception gave rise to a more cooperative idea, especially because those countries began to perceive that these missions offered various advantages to promote their policies and positions in the international arena, in addition to contributing to their domestic issues. Opportunities such as increasing the control of the military by civil authorities, maintaining more militaries in the international arena to train them in real time in combat situations, and contributing to the principles of preventive diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution were present in the field. Kenkel (2013) believes that the process of democratization in the 1980s and 1990s, the end of several conflicts and the growing process of regional integration changed some of the local conceptions of the principle of State sovereignty, as well as a greater commitment to multilateralism (Vales, 2013; Kenkel, 2013).

Participation in UN peacekeeping missions isn an important element in the approach and cooperation in security and defense matters for the South American countries. According to Aguilar, in the early 2010's the South American States had participated in 56 UN operations and around that time, of the 16 operations in progress, 12 had the presence of South American countries. As an example of an outstanding training center in the region, it is worth mentioning the Argentine Joint Training Center for Peace Operations (CAECOPAZ), established in 1995; the Joint Peace Operations Center (CECOPAC) in Chile, started in 2002; and the Joint Peace Operations Center of Brazil (CCOPAB) created in 2010. The centers specialized for the necessary training for peace operations, in addition to developing exchanges between instructors and students in the subcontinent (Aguilar, 2011; Llenderozas, 2007).

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) is considered the highest level of cooperation among the South American countries so far. MINUSTAH, founded in 2004 and in operation for more than 10 years, served as a scenario for unprecedented levels of coordination and cooperation among the South American States. It was the first mission in which South American countries actively responded with military and civilian troops in a crisis. In addition to countries in South America, contingents from Central American countries have been added, creating a Latin American identity in the operation (Llenderozas, 2007; Hirst, 2007).

Souza Neto (2013) recalls that, in 1996, the member states of MERCOSUR decided to create a forum for coordination among their Ministers of Foreign Affairs in order to promote common positions in international institutions, which was mainly due to the UN Security Council. The participation of these countries in MINUSTAH would also have contributed to bringing the contributing countries with troops closer (TCC): Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay were active members of the UN Group of Friends of Haiti, and were invited to participate in Security Council meetings to discuss the situation in Haiti and coordinate their positions on the renewal of the mandate and changes in their mission priorities.

South American cooperation in Haiti benefited from factors such as previous cooperation initiatives; the military hierarchy without differences; the culture and the proximity of the language; and the exchange of officials to carry out military courses between the different centers of the region, which allows a standardization

in the knowledge about peace operations. The Mission also generated gains in cooperation in security and defense in South America. Among the regional initiatives influenced by MINUSTAH, the 2x9 mechanism can be highlighted, as well as the ALCOPAZ, the Cruz del Sur Combined Peace Force, and the CDS, within the framework of UNASUR – as political cooperation and security efforts for plurilateralization of actions and involvement in peacekeeping (Souza Neto, 2010; Kenkel, 2013).

The ALCOPAZ (Latin American Association of Training Centers for Peace Operations) is an association of peacekeeping training centers, an initiative presented by Argentina with the objective of promoting efficiency and effectiveness in the involvement of Latin America in peace operations. The association was created in August 2008 and its current members include Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and Uruguay. One of the main effects of the association is to present a common voice in the International Association of Peacekeeping Training Centers (IAPTC), as well as to serve as a forum to share lessons learned, exchanges between centers, academic research initiatives on the issues related to peace operations and promote the exchange of knowledge between the military, police and civilian components, with the aim of encouraging the standardization of training and procedures to follow the UN guidelines (Souza Neto, 2013).

In the framework of the UNASUR's CDS, the objectives related to international peace cooperation include: reaching a common regional position in multilateral institutions; the promotion of the interoperability of the Armed Forces; an increase in regional participation based on a common doctrine; and a commitment to participate in humanitarian missions (Souza Neto, 2010).

The first CDS seminar to discuss peace missions issues was held in Montevideo in September 2010, where participants decided to create a mechanism to coordinate all areas related to participation in operations, in order to avoid duplication of work efforts and increase the capacities of the member States to participate in such missions. These coordinated efforts included joint peacekeeping exercises (which existed prior to MINUSTAH), seminars and exchanges between training centers for peace operations in the region (Souza Neto, 2013).

Several bilateral agreements and efforts are also part of these initiatives. The Cruz del Sur Combined Peace Force is a bilateral initiative, formed by Argentina and Chile. The combined peace force agreement was signed in 2005. In it, training and preparation is entrusted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which would take care of the operational implementation. Once the force is constituted, it is placed at the disposal of the United Nations, according to the UNSAS system (United Nations Stand-by Arrangement System), and may be moved with the request of the UN and approval of the two countries. In initiatives such as this, it is visible how a peace operation such as MINUSTAH, with its levels of cooperation and interaction, can generate a measure of building mutual trust and overcoming rivalries and distrust between countries, taking into account that Argentina and Chile have a history of territorial disputes (Souza Neto, 2010).

In the third axis of the CDS, cooperation in the field of defense industry and defense technologies is an important issue for UNASUR, as well as their regional autonomy objectives, based on the attempt to reduce dependence on traditional suppliers from Europe and the United States. One of the objectives is to develop a

regional Defense industry, which to ensure its development requires an international scale and its own technology, through regional cooperation, according to Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro (2014). Brazil is, because of its size and the strength of its armaments industry, the country with the greatest capacity and interest in developing this dimension of UNASUR (Rezende, 2013; Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro, 2014).

The CDS conducted an assessment of industries and technologies in the region, seeks to maintain an integrated information system, in addition to promoting security seminars, industrial defense technology to encourage cooperation and exchange of experiences (Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro, 2014). In addition, two other important projects are the development and production of a basic training aircraft, led by Brazil and Argentina; and a system of UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), led by Brazil - in addition to the participation of companies from Chile and Argentina in the project of the military transport aircraft KC-390 (Rezende, 2013; Sanahuja & Verdes-Montenegro, 2014). However, in 2018, the Brazilian company Embraer announced plans to produce or KC-390 with participation of the multinational company Boeing (Reuters, 2018b).

In the fourth axis, the CDS has developed several instances in the area of training and education: in addition to the Center for Strategic Defense Studies (CEED), in Buenos Aires, the South American School of Defense (ESUDE) was also created and inaugurated, with headquarters in Quito. The CEED is an instance of production of strategic studies, a think tank, whose mission is the generation of knowledge and dissemination of South American strategic thinking in terms of defense and security (Frenkel, 2016).

The Center for Strategic Defense Studies (CEED) is an instance of production of strategic studies, a think tank, with the mission of generating knowledge and dissemination of South American strategic thinking in terms of regional and international defense and security, under the umbrella of the CDS. The CEED was conceived as an academic production body to advise and provide the necessary information to the CDS. Its headquarters are located in Buenos Aires, and it is up to Argentina to cede the physical space – and it is perceived that it is that country that has had more initiatives for the development of CEED (Rezende, 2013).

The inauguration and implementation of the South American Defense School (ESUDE), despite not specifying its characteristics and how it will work, shows that initiatives in this direction are moving forward, consolidating the experience of the CAD-SUR courses (Advanced Course of the courses of the South American Defense) conducted by the Superior School of War (Escola Superior de Guerra, ESG) of Brazil in previous years. These joint training initiatives have relative growth, although there are few initiatives in this regard, and most of them are financed financially by Brazil (Frenkel, 2016; Rezende, 2013).

With a decentralized format, ESUDE is a center of high studies responsible for articulating the various initiatives of the member countries of the CDS for training civilians and military in the areas of Defense and Regional Security, according to Frenkel (2016). According to this author, the ESUDE contemplated principles of gradualism and flexibility, in a decentralized institutional design composed of a network of national institutions, courses and varied disciplines, with an academic proposal that can be individual for each member state or jointly with other countries. The author highlights:

[...] the creation of the ESUDE has a strong support in the previous development of initiatives directly linked to the training of civilians and military, commanded mostly by the promoting countries: Since 2012, Brazil holds the Advanced Defense Course for civilians and the military and Argentina organizes the South American Course for the Training of Civilians in Defense. Ecuador, for its part, has been planning since 2014 the South American Course on Defense and Strategic Thought (Frenkel, 2016; author's translation).

Final considerations

This article stressed that several actions and efforts by the CDS are based on experiences consolidated in other processes within the region (such as participation in UN missions, military joint exercises, military training, among others) and pointing out that the CDS-UNASUR face competition and overlap with other regional and hemispheric institutions, in a process of complexification.

The UNASUR Defense Council, in a few years of existence, has made significant progress in political dialogue. The institutionalization of a process of regional construction of cooperation in Defense contributes to the trust between the States, favoring the consolidation of the region as a zone of peace.

The construction of measures and instruments of trust and cooperation contribute to changing and / or at least diminishing the perception of rivalry, tension, mistrust and competition among States. In this sense, the inter-governmentalism and maintenance of national sovereignty (with no supranational institutionalization) of UNASUR has been convenient to build trust between the States and the institutional development of the organization, in order to favor the consolidation of an area of peace, denoting a pragmatism between reluctant States to yield sovereignty in the decision-making on policies in common organisms. However, this same intergovernmentalism and national sovereignty may also be responsible for the limits and difficulties faced by the CDS in the formulation and implementation of its projects and guidelines, as well as the possible disintegration of the institution.

We converge with Sanahuja & Comini in their diagnosis of the services provided by this institution to the region:

Generating consensus, contributing to enhance the international presence of its members, effectively managing crisis (...) UNASUR was also created to give South America more political autonomy, as an instrument of selective *soft balancing* with respect to external powers. To have tools of this kind is a judicious foreign policy in the face of the abrasive unilateralism, protectionism and rampant nationalism of the United States (2018; author's translation).

The consolidation of the concept of the South American region and the construction process of UNASUR have created new configurations in the geopolitical dashboard of the region, opening a dispute in the resolution of issues that until then were discussed only within the framework of the OAS and other Hemispheric arrangements, with potential impact in hemispheric and global geopolitics. The overlap and competition between UNASUR and other institutions and processes within

the region, hemispheric and extra-regional actors reveal a crescent complexification of international security architecture in South America.

The political changes underway in fundamental countries for the consolidation of UNASUR can have an effect on either the decrease or increase in political convergence, issues that refer to the reformulation of the organization or its possible disintegration.

The UNASUR Defense Council, in its few years of existence, has made significant progress in cooperation, the institutional development of security and defense. However, in the evaluation of authors such as Vaz, Fuccille & Rezende, the limitations of the CDS are evident:

What has prevailed is neither a sense of strong political willingness to embrace more intense levels of defense 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 please 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 (2017: 12).

The implementation of joint military exercises, several of them underway or carried out periodically for years, the consensual disclosure of expenditures and military budget, the disclosure of the “defense white papers” of each country and the integration and development of some joint projects in the defense industry, are examples of how cooperation in defense in the South American continent has the potential to develop profoundly.

In this sense, cooperation in defense among the different nations of the region should follow its course even with uncertainties, and, just as there are risks of regression and decrease, it can not be ruled out that this same cooperativon has also the possibility of increasing, deepen and develop under the guidance of other political forces, even with reformulations and redefinitions.

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