

# An ocean for the Global South: Brazil and the zone of peace and cooperation in the South Atlantic

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**Abstract:** In this article, we analyse an instance of revitalisation of a dormant interregional organisation dating back to the Cold War: the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS), initially launched by South American and African states in 1986 through the UN General Assembly. Drawing on the concepts of “consensual hegemony” we argue that the current phase of ZOPACAS’ existence is characterised by Brazil’s efforts to rekindle it, thus reflecting its aspiration to create a new space of influence. Rather than pursuing more traditional forms of regional leadership, Brazil uses ZOPACAS as part of a persuasion-based strategy based on regional multilateralism that is designed in antagonism to other international organisations and Western powers. However, this strategy also faces important limitations resulting from resource constraints, lack of institutionalisation and an excessive exclusionary focus on minimising the role of global powers with interests in the region.

## 1. Introduction

In 2007, around 150 government representatives from South American and African states along the South Atlantic met in the Angolan capital of Luanda to discuss security and development issues pertinent to the region. Nominally, the event marked the sixth summit of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS), an initiative originally launched in 1986 through the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). In practice, however, the reunion represented the first attempt to revitalize what was a dormant product from the Cold War: a trans-regional initiative created exclusively by and for developing countries. The local and global contexts had changed considerably between the 1986 inauguration and the Luanda meeting 21 years later. By the time that certain South Atlantic states, rallied by Brazil, decided to reboot the organization, the Soviet Union and

Apartheid South Africa had collapsed, the unipolar moment of the United States (US) had started to decline, and—save for the United Kingdom’s (UK) military presence in the Falklands/Malvinas—nuclear submarines from superpowers no longer patrolled the region. What, then, brought Brazil to invest in the revitalization of an organization that seemed to have lost its *raison d’être* in the post-Cold War period? And what have been the primary motivations behind this revitalization effort?

ZOPACAS is an intriguing example not only because of the time gap between its initial launch and current revival efforts, but also because the organization comprises an exclusively “Southern” initiative on all accounts: both geographically and membership-wise, as it is proposed by, composed of and dedicated to countries that identify themselves with the Global South. Given the customary role of global powers in the creation and leadership of most international organizations spanning more than one region, ZOPACAS prompts new questions about the logic of Southern institutions and the opportunities that have emerged for them in the post-Cold War system. Under what conditions or for what purposes do rising powers engage with such organizations? Providing a study of ZOPACAS contributes to a better understanding of the institutionalization of South–South cooperation in general, and of Brazil’s approach to expanding its role in the global order in particular.

We find that, in the case of ZOPACAS, the current revitalization process involves a large number of developing countries whose interests partially overlap, but whose regional and international ambitions also diverge on important points. In its attempt to claim the South Atlantic economic and security space, ZOPACAS has acquired certain traits of an international organization, such as United Nations (UN) recognition and periodic ministerial meetings. However, ZOPACAS lacks a number of characteristics typically associated with international organizations, such as a budget, headquarters, a secretary-general and institutional symbols. As a consequence, ZOPACAS lacks consistency: it easily slips into oblivion but can also easily be resurrected.

Analysing the rekindling of ZOPACAS, we argue that Brazil’s spearheading of this initiative has been driven by both inclusionary and exclusionary aspirations, but that ultimately the effort is more geared at dividing the Atlantic into North and South than at integrating the Western and Eastern shores of the South Atlantic. More specifically, under the Workers Party-led government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010), and to some extent under his successor Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016), Brazilian political elites have become more averse to the possibility of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its members playing an expanded role in the South Atlantic (Helbig 2013; Smith-Windsor 2015). To this end, Brazil has tried to mobilize other states in the region in an effort to make the South Atlantic an area of predominantly South–South cooperation, in which Western powers ought to play a secondary role. The South Atlantic has thus become an extension of what Burges (2008; 2015) has identified as Brazil’s “consensual hegemony” approach to attaining leadership in South America: a strategy based on persuasion that seeks to minimize the appearance of overtly hegemonic ambitions within the region.

ZOPACAS thus represents a relevant case to further develop the conceptualization of Brazilian’s foreign policy, as it constitutes an effort to expand

the strategy of consensual hegemony towards the South Atlantic and Africa. ZOPACAS further embodies the limits of this strategy beyond the region Brazil has successfully delineated as its neighbourhood. First, the construction of a vague, potential “intruder” in the region is a negative integration factor rather than the fulcrum of a positive agenda. Such a feature may have played an important role in the post-Cold War regionalisms in South America but can be easily questioned in the current global context. Indeed, the heavily exclusionary focus of ZOPACAS, rather than a stress on cooperation among its members, may hamper more robust region-building across the South Atlantic. Second, although regular meetings have been reinstated and its agenda has been broadened, ZOPACAS still suffers from significant hurdles in consolidating itself as a credible, effective organization. In particular, doubts remain regarding whether ZOPACAS members have enough commitment and capacity—including the ability to foster a shared “South Atlantic” identity—to advance a robust transregional agenda. Again, the involvement of the member states is much more volatile than in the established Brazilian neighbourhood. Third and more broadly, the case of ZOPACAS prompts the question of whether Southern international organizations can become effective actors imbued with collective agency when they primarily figure as instruments of rising power ambitions. ZOPACAS therefore has to be contextualized among new coalitions with nascent institutions, such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa).

The article draws on an array of primary sources, including original interviews with policymakers in Brasília, Windhoek and Luanda as well as declarations and resolutions stemming from ministerial meetings and member states. The following section provides a brief overview of how the international relations literature has dealt with Global South institutions. We then look more specifically at the role of rising powers, focusing first on the case of Brazil and, second, on its interests within the South Atlantic. After that, we analyse three elements of ZOPACAS: its original conception and launch during the late Cold War; Brazil’s role in its revitalization; and the key limitations stemming from its partial institutionalization. The conclusion acknowledges the repercussions of our findings for the study of international organizations in the South, while pointing out how the concept of consensual hegemony could be expanded.

## **2. Rising powers and the Global South**

### *2.1. International organizations and the Global South*

Although the term “Global South”—much like the concepts of the “Third World” or the “Developing World”—has been questioned due to fuzziness and normative connotations (see, for instance, Escobar 2011), the countries and societies typically included in this category generally share two conditions: a shared colonial history and low socio-economic indicators. Despite formal self-determination, their relationship with the former colonial centres has been characterized by persistent inequity, and their integration into the international system has taken place according to rules and institutions largely drawn up by the global powers that once colonized those territories (Esteva 2010; see for example Stone 2011). In addition,

their populations face high indices of social and economic exclusion (Deacon 2007), even though conditions vary widely even within the Global South. Over the past decade, some developing countries, such as Brazil and South Africa, have experienced a significant improvement along some key indicators, even though the gains are very unevenly distributed within their territories and population. Despite these gains, those states continue to routinely identify themselves with the Global South, especially when advocating for a more representative global governance system.

These traits help to explain why international organizations that are initiated and led by the Global South tend to be reformist: they generally resist or at least question the historical patterns of North–South dominance that have marked different areas of international relations (Braveboy-Wagner 2009). Many countries have been active in launching formal initiatives in the spirit of a Global South. Some of these initiatives emerge as ad hoc coalitions. The G7+, for instance, was launched in 2010 by seven so-called fragile or conflict-affected states in order to foster state-building and development by advocating reforms in the international community’s current approaches to conflict-affected countries. Other initiatives have turned into international organizations, most notably the Non-Alignment Movement as well as numerous regional organizations such as the African Union or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Participation in these organizations tends to reinforce countries’ self-identification as members of the Global South, with relations between them (commonly denoted “South–South relations”) presented as an alternative or complementary path of insertion into the global system.

## 2.2. *Brazil as a rising power: regional aspirations*

Within the post-Cold War context, certain developing countries have been identified by international relations scholars (and occasionally identified themselves) as rising powers: states that are able to draw on economic and ideational resources to exert influence in a self-defined region and that aspire to greater influence in the current global governance system, both individually and through coalitions (Hurrell 2006; Kahler 2013). A burgeoning literature has emerged over the past decade about the roles of these countries in the global order (see for example Hart and Jones 2011; Narlikar 2010). However, categories such as “rising power” or “emerging power” have also been criticized for their lack of specificity and their unidirectionality, particularly since in recent years some of these countries have experienced a significant economic slowdown. Despite oscillations in economic power, many key decision makers in these countries perceive a gradual international transition towards multipolarity that would allow them to play a more important role in the existing configuration of global governance. As a result, the notion that there are new windows of opportunity for engagement with regional and global issues has emboldened some of these states to become more active in pushing for reforms of international organizations. Part of this strategy has been the promotion of counterweights, by either launching or strengthening Global South organizations, including informal coalitions such as the BRICS and IBSA.

Within their neighbourhood, some rising powers are taking up new region-building strategies—that is, efforts meant to forge regional identities and organizations in ways that help to advance their material interests and to shape

norm-setting processes (Neumann 1994). Whereas in some instances, regional organizations may emerge in a relatively decentralized manner (Acharya 2013), in other contexts rising powers take it upon themselves to lead the efforts, benefitting from existing power asymmetries between them and other states in the region. India, for instance, has led efforts to boost the Indian Ocean Rim Association. As with the creation of any social group, region-building by rising powers entails both inclusion—in the sense of strengthening ties among members and granting membership according to a set of criteria—and exclusion, in the form of leaving out certain actors that may otherwise be interested in participating yet who are perceived as rivals. Through exclusion and inclusion, such organizations help to redefine regions so as to favour the position of rising powers within those specific spaces.

Brazil is often mentioned within the international relations literature as a rising power, and its foreign policymakers sometimes consciously use the label. Taking advantage of a growing domestic market, vast natural resources and a large young population, Brazil experienced a period of relatively high economic growth in the 2000s. Domestically, this enabled some poverty and inequality reduction, while externally this growth emboldened the country's foreign policy, which began attributing unprecedented importance to relations with other developing countries.

During Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidency, South–South relations, including with Africa, ranked among the top priorities of Brazilian foreign policy. In some respects, this strategy built upon steps taken by his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso: strategic linkages with the post-Apartheid South Africa; provision of troops to peacekeeping operations, especially in Angola; and helping to launch the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (Saraiva 1997).<sup>1</sup> Under Lula, however, the strategy of expanding relations with other developing countries was part of a broader effort to increase Brazil's autonomy in the international arena. While some have interpreted the focus on South–South relations as occurring at the expense of Brazil's ties to the advanced economies, others (Pecequillo 2010) have argued that there was in fact a strengthening of Brazil–US ties during Lula's presidency. With respect to Africa, the Lula government intensified and diversified Brazil's ties across the continent, both bilaterally and through rising power coalitions such as the IBSA Dialogue Forum and the BRICS coalition, while distancing itself from the Western powers. Through new informal platforms, Brazil has called for a more representative global governance architecture—one in which it would also have more manoeuvring space for itself. However, the degree to which these emerging institutions have been able to institutionalize themselves has varied widely; IBSA has suffered from wavering political commitment and scarce financial resources, while the BRICS grouping has sought to create a more long-term role by launching new structures with specific mandates, such as the New Development Bank (NDB) (Abdenur and Folly 2015).

The centrepiece of foreign policy during the Lula government, however, was not Africa-specific: rather, it entailed the reinvigoration of Brazil's long-time aspiration to become a permanent seat holder at the United Nations Security Council

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<sup>1</sup> The bulk of these efforts were largely based on the initial outreach carried out under Presidents Jânio Quadros and João Goulart's Independent Foreign Policy line between 1961 and 1964. Afterwards, Brazilian officials maintained steady economic interests towards such regional heavyweights as Nigeria and Angola.

(UNSC) (Vargas Garcia 2012). Expanding the country's South–South ties became strategically important as a way to broaden the support that Brazil enjoyed in the UNGA for its UNSC bid, as well as to secure key leadership positions of other established multilateral organizations. However, these global ambitions required considerable regional clout. In order to achieve such leadership, Brazil collaborated with other left-wing governments in the region to keep the US at bay while founding new exclusive South American institutions. Most prominently, Brazil led efforts to launch the Community of South American Nations in 2008, which turned into the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). In the area of security, UNASUR has created the South American Defense Council to facilitate regional military coordination. In certain domains these new arrangements directly compete with the Organization of American States (OAS), of which the US is still an influential member (Weiffen et al 2013).

These moves can be interpreted as attempts by Brazil to ascertain a degree of consensual hegemony in South America. In Burges' (2008) interpretation, Brazil's regional ambitions on the sub-continent are not readily explained by the mainstream neo-realist focus on hegemony. Instead, he argues that Brazil has worked to gain strength through a 'non-domineering hegemony' that relies on consent rather than explicit coercion or the threat thereof: 'The imperative was not to subsume other regional states to Brazilian will, but instead to cycle the region-forming process through Brazil and position the country's propositions and prerogatives as the central unifying factor of a potential South American region' (Burges 2008, 75).

Despite increased contestation to such an approach in its regional diplomacy (Malamud 2011; Burges 2015), Brazil applies pressure and launches initiatives, often through multilateral channels, to structure neighbourhood relations and regional organizations in a way that benefits Brazil's interests, without posing as an aggressive neighbour. However, such institutional proactivity is also often accompanied by hesitancy in assuming the bulk of the associated costs. Far from an innovation of the Workers Party-led government, this indirect and consensual approach is a strong aspect of traditional Brazilian diplomacy dating back to at least the Cold War, even if consensual hegemony is not a conscious strategy per se. Rather, this particular dynamic is inferred and has developed incrementally over time, as Brazil tries to balance its regional leadership aspirations against external and domestic constraints. These have included rivalries within the region as well as oscillating growth and persistent socio-economic challenges such as elevated levels of poverty, social inequality and crime, which limit the resources that the government can allocate to international efforts.

### 2.3. *The South Atlantic: a Brazilian ocean?*

Although consensual hegemony has been understood within the Brazilian context in terms of the country's ambitions in South America, the concept may be extrapolated to another geopolitical space that has acquired new significance in both Brazilian foreign and defense policies: the South Atlantic. Historically, Brazilian foreign and defense policies have focused on its landmass and terrestrial borders, with the Amazon and the River Plate Basin featuring as key points of security concern. However, Brazilian military circles, especially the Navy, have long nurtured

ambitions of enhanced naval power in the South Atlantic. As far back as 1978, Brazilian decision makers began debating the idea of developing a nuclear-powered submarine to patrol its waters (Martins Filho 2011).

Yet it was not until the mid-2000s that the South Atlantic was granted a level of strategic importance in Brazil's foreign and defense policies. On the political side, this shift was largely a result of the Lula's government desire to strengthen ties with African countries. On the defense side, the 2007 discovery of large reserves of oil and gas in the pre-salt layers off the Brazilian coast and deeper within the South Atlantic reinvigorated interest in Brazil's maritime spaces. The Navy launched a public awareness campaign, entitled "Blue Amazon", that seeks to draw parallels between Brazil's legal waters—rich in resources, vast, and hence difficult to patrol—with the "green" Amazon, thus mobilizing popular support for the new initiatives in the South Atlantic (da Silva 2013). These efforts have included not only stepping up plans to expand Brazil's legal waters under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) but also a naval upgrading programme encompassing the acquisition of vessels and equipment as well as the development, in collaboration with France, of the long-coveted nuclear-powered attack submarine.

In addition to expanding its naval power, Brazil has worked to deepen its diplomatic ties to African states along the South Atlantic. This strategy entails not only the traditional channels of diplomacy, namely the Ministry of External Relations (also known as Itamaraty) and the Presidency, but also the Armed Forces, with the Navy in particular playing an important role in establishing bilateral cooperation initiatives including officer and cadet training, provision of vessels and equipment, and assistance with continental shelf mapping (Seabra 2014).<sup>2</sup> Concurrently, certain military and civilian circles in Brazil have grown more concerned with the prospect of US- and NATO-led interventions in the South Atlantic (see for example Antunes 2010). The resolve to keep great powers from "meddling" in the region has reemerged in political discourse as Brazil's increased economic and political profile encouraged bolder claims of leadership within the South Atlantic.

Accordingly, Brazil sought to rally African countries behind its own vision for the South Atlantic. Benefiting from an international commodities boom, it invested significantly in new multilateral arrangements such as IBSA and the Africa–South America (ASA) Summits. From the viewpoint of Brazilian decision makers, these intergovernmental alliances could potentially broaden support for Brazil's growing assertiveness in the Global South. Nevertheless, the wider geographic membership of those coalitions did not lend itself to an exclusive focus on the South Atlantic. As a Brazilian diplomat puts it, in the context of 'construction and rediscovery of the mechanisms of cooperation with African countries, ZOPACAS emerged as something that already existed and that was worth investing in and developing further'.<sup>3</sup> More striking in this approach is the fact that resurrecting dormant organizations can be deemed an uncommon strategy among emerging powers. Generally, aspiring hegemons tend to create new organizations that are tailored to their envisaged sphere of influence and that may question

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<sup>2</sup> Brazil has also worked to vastly expand the international legal definition of its territorial waters by filing a proposal with UNCLOS, based on surveys of its own continental shelf (da Silva 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Interview #1 with Brazilian diplomat, Brasília, June 2013.

existing frameworks. In the Brazilian case, that was achieved with the formation of UNASUR in the face of the OAS.<sup>4</sup>

However, at the time of Brazil's reengagement with the South Atlantic, the objectless ZOPACAS happened to match Brazil's vision for the region. Not only did ZOPACAS offer an alternative, conveniently loose framework for reshaping regional dynamics, it also implied a Southern exclusivity that, when coupled with distrust of Northern actors, matched the prevalent Brazilian discourse of a South Atlantic free of external interference. As former Foreign Minister Antônio Patriota stated in 2013, Brazil's overall concerns towards NATO remained, namely the search for 'partnerships outside of its defensive area, way beyond the North Atlantic, including in regions of peace, democracy, social inclusion and which do not admit in its territory arms of mass destruction' (Patriota 2013b).

The discursive appropriation of South Atlantic dynamics suggests that Brazil's consensual hegemony approach has expanded beyond its land-based neighbourhood—that is, South America. This does not necessarily warrant the employment of significant material resources towards the fulfillment of such geographic interest. But it does account for another attempt to obtain global recognition as a successful aggregating leader in the regional domain in a bid for further international relevance. In this case, however, clear steps have also been taken to exclude actors perceived as external, namely Western global powers. Transforming the South Atlantic into a *mare brasiliensis* thus entails two simultaneous strategies: on the one hand, pulling African actors into the fold of a potential South Atlantic identity while, on the other, ensuring that competing actors such as NATO or the US are viewed as intrusive and that their influence within the region is minimized.

### 3. ZOPACAS: a Global South organization

#### 3.1. *The South Atlantic and ZOPACAS: a break from the Cold War*

During most of the Cold War, the South Atlantic represented a marginal space in global geopolitics for the great powers. Early efforts to structure relations in this space yielded few results, as they lacked necessary support by all invested parts. In the 1960s, for instance, Brazilian and Portuguese officials discussed a common political-security arrangement, but the initiative never took off due to the difficulties of conciliating such a project with the remaining Portuguese colonies in Africa. In the 1970s, South Africa proved equally unsuccessful in convincing the US and South American countries to support the idea of bringing the Indian and South Atlantic oceans under an anti-communist "Southern Cross Alliance" (Kelly and Child 1988; Leysens 1992). The idea of creating a defense organization in the South Atlantic continued to circulate among Argentina, South Africa and Uruguay, who advocated the creation of the South Atlantic Treaty Organisation, mirroring the aims of NATO (Hurrell 1983). Brazil, however, remained sceptical due to conflicting views between Itamaraty and the Armed Forces on how to best engage Apartheid-ruled South Africa (Penna Filho 2013; Saraiva 1997). The latter's international pariah status also prevented full participation by African countries and by the democratizing South American states. Finally, the 1982 war between

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<sup>4</sup> Similar attempts can be observed with China's promotion of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank or Russia's push for the Eurasian Economic Union, both initiatives creating tensions with existing institutions.



Argentina and the United Kingdom over the Falklands/Malvinas dashed aspirations of a Western-friendly South Atlantic.

Following these non-starters, a new form of cooperation between adjacent countries of the South Atlantic emerged in 1986 in the form of ZOPACAS. Founded by all states bordering the South Atlantic—with the exception of South Africa, then-occupied Namibia, and countries with overseas territories in the region—ZOPACAS essentially aimed to establish the South Atlantic as a demilitarized space free of foreign military bases, internal aggression and weapons of mass destruction. The Apartheid regime was explicitly mentioned as both aggressor and threat to the security of the region while, implicitly, the memory of Operation Argus—three atmospheric nuclear bomb tests held in the South Atlantic by the US in the 1950s—fueled additional concerns. The secondary purpose of ZOPACAS during this period was to promote development cooperation among member states in the economic, environmental and social domains.<sup>5</sup>

ZOPACAS thus represented a shift away from previous attempts to structure relations within the South Atlantic. Instead of adapting to a bipolar world order, its underlying rationale was to autonomously change the power structure within the South Atlantic. The voting pattern at the UNGA underscored the Global South scope of this project. While the overwhelming majority of 124 states approved the proposal, the US rejected it; and the eight abstainers were mostly former colonial powers and NATO members.<sup>6</sup> Like other Global South organizations of its time, ZOPACAS brought together a large number of hitherto disconnected states through shared rejection of imperial and colonial dominance.

However, notwithstanding the joint initiative at the UN, different individual motives substantiated Brazil, Argentina and African countries' participation. For its chief promoter, Brazil, ZOPACAS constituted an important geopolitical instrument. By helping to devise a multilateral guarantor of a peaceful South Atlantic, Brazil primarily sought to institutionalize its ascendancy over the discussion of any other possible collective projects in the region. At the same time, its deepening relations with Africa stood to benefit from a structured framework that professed the exclusion of Apartheid South Africa as well as European powers with a nearby military presence (Saraiva 1997). In addition, ZOPACAS embodied a far-reaching normative agenda to which many of the member countries already subscribed. The emphasis on non-militarization and non-proliferation traits effectively disguised Brazil's shortcomings in terms of the military capabilities needed to assume any kind of overall responsibility for the protection and security of this area. Argentina, on the other hand, backed ZOPACAS because the initiative provided support for its foreign policy priority, the Falklands/Malvinas. As the country reviewed its adherence to the West (Tulchin 1987), ZOPACAS provided a space to promote Argentina's foreign interests. It gave the country the opportunity to escape the bipolar system, to build up relations with new allies in the Global South, and to gather support in claiming sovereignty over the Falklands/Malvinas.

For most African members, though, ZOPACAS was an important step towards both overcoming Apartheid and achieving the independence of Namibia, since the institutionalization of relations with states across the South Atlantic reinforced

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<sup>5</sup> A/RES/41/11 of 27 October 1986.

<sup>6</sup> The abstainers were Belgium, France, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and West Germany.

the isolation of the South African government. ZOPACAS thus complemented organizations with an anti-colonial dimension, such as the Frontline States and the Non-Alignment Movement, providing them with additional legitimacy through its official origins within the United Nations. To the rulers of young African states, maintaining a zone free of nuclear weapons would also help stabilize their status quo in the face of frequent internal political instability (Khanyile 2003). A non-securitized South Atlantic might curb hegemonic expansions and relieve African states from having to build up their own naval forces.

Despite the widespread support for the forum at its early stages, ZOPACAS did not have a leading country that could garner undisputed support from all members (Lechini 2007). More importantly, in the 1990s, these countries' priorities began to shift. The relevance of anti-colonialism declined following the independence of Namibia and the democratic transition in South Africa, while the insertion into the global economic system trumped South-South solidarity. Hence, much as occurred with other organizations of the Global South during that period, new objectives were included in an attempt to prolong the existence of ZOPACAS. For instance, it started to consider assistance to African democratic transitions by supporting human rights, multiparty systems and racial equality. In addition, environmental issues and organized crime emerged as important policy fields.<sup>7</sup> The new thematic areas were also the results of a changing context. As both the Cold War and the Apartheid regime came to an end, many countries started acknowledging that some of the original premises behind ZOPACAS had become outdated. Proliferation fears, for instance, had already been reduced after 1994, when all participating countries officially declared the South Atlantic a zone free of nuclear weapons.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, defense and security had also gradually lost their regional centrality as such issues were relegated to the fold of bilateral relations, particularly among countries with relevant navies. Finally, despite a series of high-level meetings in Rio de Janeiro (1988), Abuja (1990), Brasília (1994), and Somerset (1996), the non-binding nature of ZOPACAS' declarations and action plans—coupled with its irregular calendar of activities—translated itself into a decreasing level of commitment from member states. Heterogeneity among these states, as well as the lack of interest in maritime security and economy, kept ZOPACAS at a very low level of interaction.

After the 1998 meeting in Buenos Aires, ZOPACAS' relevance further decreased, as it entered a near decade-long hibernation. This retraction can be attributed to three factors. First, an acute lack of logistical capacity prevented Benin from organizing the next gathering, as it had pledged during the 1994 Brasília meeting, under different economic and political expectations.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, the emergence of new regionalisms on both sides of the South Atlantic provided alternative multi-lateral mechanisms to deal with common issues of interest (Mattheis 2014). The Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), for example, began to take precedence for their members, which preferred to invest more heavily in such structures rather than in ZOPACAS. The

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the Declaration on the Marine Environment adopted at the third meeting in Brasília; A/49/467, Annex III of 4 October 1994.

<sup>8</sup> A/49/467, Annex II of 4 October 1994.

<sup>9</sup> A/49/467, 31 of 4 October 1994.

negotiations between MERCOSUR and the Southern African Customs Union towards a preferential trade agreement illustrate this trend. Thirdly, ZOPACAS' dormancy also reflected the disengagement by Latin American countries from their African counterparts. By the turn of the century, Argentina and Brazil, in particular, faced severe economic crises that significantly limited their range of action abroad (Lechini 2007). Under these circumstances, ZOPACAS' resolve weakened as member states became less willing to spend time and resources in resuming its activities.

### 3.2. *The revitalization of ZOPACAS: from Luanda to Montevideo*

After years of inertia, ZOPACAS surfaced again in 2006, when the final declaration of the first ASA summit referenced the former's contribution to regional cooperation on peace and security (ASA 2006, 6). Such timely acknowledgement of both the forum's existence and its *raison d'être* hinted at its potential appeal, at a time when both regions were starting to reconnect. Harnessing this general interest, Angola spearheaded a series of low-key meetings between mid-level officials, the first of which took place in New York in March 2007, focusing on the original themes of ZOPACAS: economic cooperation and nuclear non-proliferation. A second workshop was held a month later in Montevideo and dealt with combating and preventing crime, peacekeeping operations, and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Finally, in May, a third workshop was held in Buenos Aires, with maritime issues high on the agenda, including the sustainable use of maritime genetic resources, and fighting illegal fishing. The cumulative results of these meetings provided enough common ground to then convene the Ministerial Meeting in Luanda in June 2007.

The meeting succeeded in achieving its primary goal: to secure the subsequent transfer of the responsibilities for managing ZOPACAS' affairs to Uruguay. But more importantly, the meeting's proceedings were also a testament to a new global context. In both the final declaration and the plan of action, ZOPACAS was now willing to tackle a broad array of pressing international issues, ranging from climate change negotiations to the Millennium Development Goals and global economic governance. Meanwhile, nuclear non-proliferation and regional security retained their centrality within the ZOPACAS agenda.<sup>10</sup> This thematic variety reflected the growing assertiveness of the Global South, and it helped ZOPACAS to position itself within increasingly vocal calls for more adequate representation and participation in global decision-making. ZOPACAS' broadened agenda also elevated its standing vis-à-vis competing regional projects.

Despite such favourable prospects, Brazil chose to play a secondary role during the initial stages of the revitalization—Brazil's growing South Atlantic interests and its longstanding preference for multiple multilateral initiatives notwithstanding. Unlike most African countries, the Brazilian delegation to Luanda was led not by a cabinet member but rather by a diplomat, signaling the country's cautious engagement. Further reinforcing this perception, at the subsequent 61st UNGA, held in September 2007, Brazil did not express its support for the ZOPACAS resolution submitted by Angola on the basis of the recent meeting, as it had previously

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<sup>10</sup> A/61/1019, Annex 1 of 7 August 2007.

done since 1986.<sup>11</sup> Brazil's positioning seemed to call into question its previous commitment to provide ZOPACAS with a central role at the UN.

How to explain such non-committal behaviour at the early stages of this process? An analysis of the developments within Brazil's policymaking indicates two reasons. First, Brazil indeed sought to break the formal deadlock of ZOPACAS' untransferred presidencies, but it was unwilling to fully commit itself to an unknown result without first ascertaining whether the conditions were ripe. In other words, 'it suited Brazil that Angola assumed the presidency' so that it could test the waters of African interest without compromising recent gains in terms of Brazilian public profile, won across the continent during the first years of Lula da Silva's government.<sup>12</sup> Given that investing resources and political capital in an irregular platform entails certain risks, Brazil initially sought to tread carefully, evaluating the chances of renewed activities only after the Luanda meeting. Secondly, in 2007, Brazil was still in the process of redefining its interests in the South Atlantic. Foreign policy overtures towards Africa had already taken place, but Brazil's defense agenda was still being revised. Recurrent changes at the helm of the Defense Ministry and the protracted process behind the country's first National Defense Strategy added to the uncertainty and help to explain Brazil's initial detachment from ZOPACAS' revitalization.

Despite this ambivalent start, as Brazil reconceptualized the South Atlantic, ZOPACAS' perceived usefulness increased accordingly. Its singular geographic delineation fitted into Brazil's discourse for the region, which presupposed excluding actors and policies that did not match ZOPACAS' rationale of non-proliferation and peaceful resolution of conflicts. As a Brazilian diplomat explained, supporting ZOPACAS' revival and consolidation comprised in itself 'a message to the outside', namely that 'there are certain ways of doing things, we [Brazil] don't want for our region. ... There are tendencies to expand ranges of action, which most of the times do not correspond to what we consider best and more constructive for the [South Atlantic] region'.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, ZOPACAS' revitalization acquired strategic importance for Brazilian national defense, following the publication of Brazil's first Defense White Paper (Brazil, Ministry of Defense 2012, 35–36). In turn, this formal acknowledgment required Brazil to participate more actively and more publicly in the initiative's activities.

Recognizing the need to foster activities between ministerial meetings, Brazil offered to organize a two-day conceptual roundtable in Brasilia in December 2010. Together with representatives of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Seabed Authority and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, member countries agreed on the need for an exchange of best practices and for capacity-building in the areas of mapping and exploring the seabed, as well as for strengthened cooperation in the environmental area and on aerial and maritime transportation.

However, as had happened before, ZOPACAS soon faced practical hurdles due to Uruguay's logistical difficulties in organizing the 2011 meeting. Subsequently, the next Ministerial Meeting took place only in January 2013, in Montevideo, frustrating expectations of greater regularity. Yet even these drawbacks did not temper

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<sup>11</sup> A/61/PV.107 of 13 September 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Interview #2 with Angolan diplomat, Luanda, June 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Interview #3 with Brazilian diplomat, Brasília, June 2013.

ambitions for ZOPACAS as its agenda continued to expand.<sup>14</sup> Taking advantage of the work previously done in Brasília, a new plan of action was issued, providing a new framework for cooperation activities and closer contacts at the UNGA. Finally, the initiative's collective stance on security questions regarding the sovereignty of the Falklands/Malvinas, international drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau and armed strife in the Democratic Republic of Congo underscored ZOPACAS' aspiration to generate common positions on issues of conflict and peace.<sup>15</sup> Recognizing that the Luanda agenda had not yet been accomplished, members embarked on a second revitalization effort that sought to increase the profile of ZOPACAS within a context of competing multilateral frameworks. Ultimately,

it's a question of awareness. ... The more frequency, the more meetings are made aware, we are going to have a lot interest from Africa, especially because they will benefit from capacity building, they will benefit from environmental protection and so on.<sup>16</sup>

This time, however, Brazil was willing to commit to the process, raising expectations over its leadership. Considering the difficulties of organizing multi-regional meetings involving representatives from 24 countries, the Brazilian Air Force dispatched an airplane to Africa to make sure delegations from smaller African countries made it to Uruguay. Additionally, Brazil made its diplomatic network in Africa available to Uruguayan authorities to help in preparatory contacts with each participating member. And, for the first time ever, both Brazil's External Relations and Defense Ministers took part in the work proceedings of the Montevideo meeting, showcasing the relevance of ZOPACAS for the country's foreign and defense policy circles. Two central ideas were then conveyed as precursors for greater Brazilian engagement. First, common South Atlantic interests were emphasized as the basis for closer cooperation, but only if they 'have visibility before the entire world' (Patriota 2013a). In other words, Brazil wanted increased external recognition of those dynamics. Secondly, ZOPACAS' institutional development was elevated to a matter of national interest for every member country by highlighting common threats as well as unwanted outside alternatives. In the words of then-Defense Minister Celso Amorim: 'If we don't take charge of peace and security in the South Atlantic, others will. And they will not do it the way that we want: with the vision of a developing country that rejects any colonial or neo-colonial behavior' (Amorim 2013a, 2).

Seeking to match words with deeds, Brazilian authorities announced in Montevideo that the Brazilian Cooperation Agency would offer 122 openings in training initiatives on the areas identified by the Montevideo Action Plan, for officials from every ZOPACAS country. Later in 2013, a workshop on maritime search and rescue was also held in Brazil, with the country assuming the leading role and covering the full costs of each member's participation. The emphasis remained on how these initiatives could function as precautionary measures, given that 'the more we cooperate, the lesser space we will leave for undue foreign interference' (Amorim 2013b, 2).

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<sup>14</sup> Further evidence of such thematic expansion can be found in the topics covered by the declarations. If by 1999 in Buenos Aires the final declaration included 23 points, in Luanda that number expanded to 80 and afterwards, in Montevideo, to 124.

<sup>15</sup> A/67/746, Annex 1 of 19 February 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Interview #4 with Namibian diplomat, Windhoek, June 2014.

### 3.3. *The limits of ZOPACAS*

Since its creation, ZOPACAS has struggled to position itself amidst multilateral organizations with which it thematically and geographically overlaps. Originally framed around a UNGA resolution, it managed to attract the interest of its members precisely due to its loose format and minimal institutionalization. ZOPACAS thus did not develop centralized headquarters or a secretary-general position that could personify the organization. The entire formal structure has remained intergovernmental and largely dependent on the commitment of the responsible national ministries. ZOPACAS archives, for instance, need to be handed over each time a presidency is transferred to another country. Non-state actors, in comparison, play a very secondary role in ZOPACAS. Civil society and especially businesses are mentioned as potentially involved parties, but a regular consultation process has not been established.<sup>17</sup>

The only modicum of resident structure can be found in the so-called Permanent Committee adjoined to the UNGA, designed to foster continuous dialogue between member states by taking advantage of each country's diplomatic missions to the UN. Led by current and former chairs, as well as the chair of the subsequent ministerial meeting, it functions as the sole follow-up guarantor to ZOPACAS activities. Ultimately, the Committee is responsible for making informal contacts at the margins of the UNGA yearly sessions, reviewing progress over the different initiatives, submitting annual UNGA resolutions, and requesting other UN bodies to routinely assist in the implementation of the various action plans. The UN system is thus uniquely central to ZOPACAS' existence and to its continuing relevance within the international system.

Decision-making, however, continues to be exerted primarily through the ministerial meetings. By rotating the hosting of each meeting, ZOPACAS strives to promote a shared sense of inclusiveness and parity between its members. Yet this can also hamper the advancement of the regional agenda, as the organization depends heavily on a single member state for the success of working proceedings. Many members are small countries with very limited budget and personnel for such events, and the hosting of a ZOPACAS meeting does not necessarily occupy a top priority amidst regular foreign policy commitments. As past occasions have shown, the capacity to regularly organize, attend and follow up such meetings faces severe constraints. The successive postponement and eventual cancellation of the ministerial meeting planned for 2015 in Cape Verde comprises only but the latest example.

Despite these institutional limitations, ZOPACAS constitutes a working platform for members to lobby for their interests, and final declarations reflect each country's national priorities. Moreover, the prolonged and sometimes irregular standby periods turn ZOPACAS into a significant arena for launching ad hoc initiatives. In practice, ZOPACAS can be conceived as an effective ground for recruiting allies for initiatives related to the South Atlantic or to ZOPACAS' stake in global governance institutions. The issue of whaling illustrates this dynamic. After Latin American states agreed on a common position on whale watching and a moratorium on commercial whaling in the International Whaling Commission, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay turned to ZOPACAS to gain support from

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<sup>17</sup> A/67/476, Annex I of 14 February 2013.

other member states for their proposal to establish a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic (Bailey 2012).

Nevertheless, given ZOPACAS' lack of institutionalization and the limited capacity of many members to deal with pressing maritime security challenges, occasional policy convergences do not suffice to forestall the presence of other external actors in the region. The US, the UK, France and other NATO members maintain a military presence and continue to act as providers of regional security against such issues as drug trafficking or piracy. Conversely, ZOPACAS contends to hold a degree of regional legitimacy, while embodying the role of a discursive gatekeeper that can judge which external actions are acceptable or even desirable in the South Atlantic. Still, the organization lacks the capacity to monopolize the maritime space and is unable to provide exclusive South Atlantic solutions to problems that invariably call for external solutions. The case of exercises conducted by extra-regional navies in this maritime space constitutes a case in point.

Above all, ZOPACAS underpins its intentions of establishing an international regime in the South Atlantic with a clear antipode in mind: a "Global NATO" assuming responsibility for security in the Global South (see for comparison Daalder and Goldgeier 2006). ZOPACAS aspires to make the rejection of nuclear weapons, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and self-governance by the South into norms, but these remain ambitions, and ZOPACAS' functional and geostrategic priorities shift on an ad hoc basis according to the impulses of key actors. Most members use ZOPACAS to simultaneously enhance their sovereignty vis-à-vis external powers and internal threats. But for Brazil in particular, the forum serves as an instrument to expand regional leadership, to delineate a renewed transregional space, and to balance NATO and the US.

Even though Brazil has been favourable to maintaining ZOPACAS' loose framework, the ambition to revitalize ZOPACAS as a relevant regional actor for global governance requires a steady commitment that faces two important caveats. First, Brazil's lack of material means to single-handedly alter the region's security context poses hurdles to its intended regional authority, since the discourse it promotes is sometimes unmatched by its actual capacity. As challenges on African shores increase—from trafficking routes through Guinea-Bissau to piracy spikes in the surrounding Gulf—Brazil will be expected to play a heftier part and to commit further resources to joint efforts. Inability to do so may undermine any semblance of unity behind Brazilian aspirations towards ZOPACAS.

Secondly, the bulk of the costs associated with such a wide agenda need to be assumed by its chief proponent. Although Brazil's financial commitments to ZOPACAS increased in a post-Montevideo meeting context, its limits are also apparent. In late 2014, for instance, Brazil was expected to organize a second ZOPACAS seminar on peacekeeping operations but had to scrap it due to new budgetary pressures and shifting political priorities. As internal economics increase, any consistent ambitions in this regard may become ultimately compromised. Hence, there is a risk of ZOPACAS becoming too dependent on Brazil's fluctuating economic cycles and internal political willingness to bankroll such initiatives. Brazilian decision makers must thus manage expectations over the country's role in ZOPACAS' progressive development.

#### 4. Reflections about international organizations of the Global South

ZOPACAS illustrates how rising powers can resort to organizations of the Global South so as to contest existing forms of multilateralism that are perceived as Northern-dominated. In this regard, Brazil has been involved in reshaping governance structures in its neighbourhood by creating new organizations, thus trying to discredit existing arrangements in which it feels overpowered. Other rising powers, such as South Africa and Nigeria, engage in similar behaviour, which can be partly explained by the concept of contested multilateralism (Morse and Keohane 2014)—that is, shifting issues to different arenas after dissatisfaction over the rules and missions in existing international organizations. However, our analysis points to particularities concerning the approach of emerging powers. Firstly, actors do not necessarily shift from one organization to another. They can also contest multilateral structures to which they do not formally belong. Indeed, the Global South actors behind the creation and revitalization of ZOPACAS do not contest NATO's existence. Rather, they aim to fill a gap in terms of security in the South Atlantic before other organizations step in, including NATO itself. Secondly, contestation is not limited to the rules or missions of an organization but can also entail a strong focus on membership. If we conceive ZOPACAS in opposition to NATO as a Western-based organization, the most striking feature is the lack of any overlap. ZOPACAS clearly defines itself over who is not a member, and it looks unlikely to incorporate states from the North, no matter how tangible the territorial, military or economic presence of the UK or the US in the South Atlantic might be. Despite its lack of institutionalization, the revival of ZOPACAS thus provides an important indicator of how the rising power Brazil intends to project its leadership and how it defines the next frontier between potential allies and contestants.

ZOPACAS also serves a two-fold purpose for Brazil's consensual hegemonic aspiration in the South Atlantic: it excludes competing security providers and includes actors that can provide legitimacy. It thereby follows a similar logic to contested multilateralism within South America: MERCOSUR helped to prevent the US-led Free Trade Area of the Americas while UNASUR is presented as an alternative to the OAS. Both contenders excluded the biggest rivals of Brazil in the hemisphere—the US and Mexico—from security governance and infrastructure projects in South America. Likewise, the resurrection of ZOPACAS reflects a fault line in the Atlantic between the North and the South. Even though ZOPACAS lacks the resources to become an effective security provider, Brazilian authorities conceive it as a fitting delineation of the maritime space in which Brazil feels confident enough to exercise influence. Consensual hegemony is therefore applicable not only to the established neighbourhood of regional powers structured around landmasses but also to areas hitherto largely outside of their reach, in this case the South Atlantic.

Inasmuch as the concept of consensual hegemony should bring more attention to how rising powers stretch the territorial and regional borders of their influence, its limitations also merit consideration. In a revision of his original take, Burges points out the temporality inherent in the concept, as any 'credibility [previously] won eventually wanes if not matched with concrete leadership goods provision' (Burges 2015, 204). While consensual hegemony pursuit might easily fit Brazil's multiple region-formation aims, its chances of success will depend on the capacity to deliver on the expectations it has helped to raise among its South Atlantic



partners. Such a constellation differs from its role within BRICS, where any type of hegemony would be difficult to achieve. Conversely, further institutionalization of BRICS such as the establishment of alternative global financial institutions does not primarily depend on Brazil's involvement.

The case of ZOPACAS further illustrates two particular characteristics of interregional organizations confined to the Global South. The first characteristic is socio-economic. In most organizations, member states often lack the necessary means to ensure that agendas are effectively implemented. Even when resources are available, the priority is to privilege multilateral or regional memberships that are of vital necessity, yield significant returns or have a penalty mechanism. Global South organizations in general, and ZOPACAS in particular, fail to rank favourably on these criteria. Budget and dedicated personnel are very limited, which constrains the credibility of its declarations. Various regional organizations in Africa and Latin America have compensated by resorting to external financial sources, such as European foreign aid. However, this path can lead to donor dependency and undermines the legitimacy of such an undertaking. Since ZOPACAS was created and revived in a spirit of opposition to the involvement of external actors it is difficult to envisage the inclusion of donors for the purpose of rent-seeking.

The second characteristic concerns the shared experience of colonialism and its impact on the interpretation of sovereignty as national sovereignty. Most ZOPACAS member states are extremely reluctant to transfer power to any kind of permanent structure, especially in matters of security. Hence, non-interference is not only upheld as a norm to exclude foreign powers but also as a basic rule inside the region. This stance yields resistance to supranational institutionalization and centralized power-sharing. Instead of delegating competencies to or pooling authority in a permanent secretariat, decision-making and implementation are confined to interactions between national ministries. In this sense, the institutionalization of ZOPACAS reinforces the paradigm of national sovereignty but severely limits the creation of South Atlantic sovereignty.

Regardless, ZOPACAS shows that it is possible to cut across established continental regions and attempt to redefine a maritime space as a region in its own right. The organization's main aggregating trait can be found in its claim to oversee a demarcated space while minimizing the relevance of outside actors. However, the difficulties in creating a shared identity are evident. The idea of a common adversary is a very powerful mortar and can certainly constitute the foundation for an integration process that sustains itself even after the perceived threat vanishes. Yet, for all purposes, a South Atlantic identity is still missing in ZOPACAS, thus demonstrating that the exclusive element still dominates over the inclusive dimension.

Despite its current limitations, ZOPACAS' resurgence in the present international context exemplifies the emergence of new opportunities for multilateralism within the Global South. If Southern regional powers become actively involved, the international organizations they promote are likely to coincide with their self-perceived regional spaces, where their influence can be exerted and ideational gains can be reaped. However, in order to fully carve out an ocean of the Global South, the other members of ZOPACAS will also have to decide whether or not to accept Brazil as their consensual hegemon. Until other countries are able to appropriate and conceptualize the South Atlantic as their ocean, and until Brazil matches its leadership aspirations with the corresponding political and financial

commitments, common solutions will not only remain fragile, they will also continue to be designed by those who are both able and willing to afford the support of their peers.

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