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Bilateralism, Intermestic Security, and the Return of Old Practices

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Introduction

The departure of more than half of the members of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) brought about the deregionalisation of cooperation in South America, thereby favouring the implementation of individual agreements developed and prioritised by governments based on their national domestic interests and putting regional cooperation to one side as a standard of propaganda (Legler, 2020). This deregionalisation is characterised by low levels of regional cooperation, resulting from a minimal political convergence of governments and the absence of leadership previously assumed by Brazil (see Deciancio & Quiliconi, Chapter 1). In addition to this situation, there is little interest in developing the regional institutions created during the South American post-hegemonic period.

The situation is no different with regard to security and defence, but it presents some distinctive nuances. The high levels of criminality at the countries' borders, the gradual abandonment by the state of development programmes in border areas, as well as the attention and increasingly worrying relationship between homicides and the region's illegal markets, represent factors that have led South American governments to reduce regional cooperation and any interest in strengthening institutions of integration to a minimum. The national or individual interest of each country focused its attention on pragmatic bilateralism, characterised by the implementation of activities, joint operations, and other political measures in border areas which were defined as being of high bilateral and strategic concern. This "new" type of intermestic security merits special attention, given the lack of interest shown in it by studies on international or global security and its cooperative paradigm which was becoming cumbersome and out of keeping with the realities of South American security. The supposed advantages and benefits of regional cooperation turned out to be ineffective and disastrous at the time of the pandemic.

At the worst moments of national vulnerability, when faced with the spread of the pandemic in 2020, South America as a whole was unable to establish any clear parameter of regional cooperation regarding the threat of global health insecurity. What prevailed was a nationalist and isolationist logic of *sauve qui peut* through alliances, networks, or opportunities for short-term bilateral cooperation

which some countries in the region employed with several states that produced medicines, vaccines, and the latest medical technology, although UNASUR had the necessary coordination tools to create a mechanism for the regional public purchase of medicines. With the disappearance of UNASUR, four years earlier, due to the self-satisfaction of its leaders, to expansive self-promotion, and pervaded by fragmentation and ideological polarisation that led to political impotence (González et al., 2021), the former members of the regional body had to face a scenario full of systemic challenges on account of the duality of global threats. On the one hand, the overwhelming, complex, and devastating pandemic eroded the governments' preventive and reactive capacity for human safety, which hastened the lack of coordination and planning with regard to safety between the countries of the region, plus the competition for the acquisition of vaccines during 2020. On the other hand, the presence of transnational organised crime, which continued to operate in several South American countries despite the isolationist measures that were taken to deal with the threats, was just as systemic and dangerous as the pandemic.

The conjunction of these two important additional and inter-regional factors has strengthened individual national initiatives and bilateral actions in the face of the withdrawal of cooperation and the importance of regional break-up which became pronounced during the COVID-19 crisis. Isolationist nationalism produced policies of closed territoriality and militarised a good deal of the management of the pandemic. Together with this phenomenon, the systemic/global presence of organised crime using strategies and deployments of cyber-crime technology, organic infiltration, and institutional permeability succeeded in keeping up their operations and increased their dynamic in several countries of the region, so that it came to be seen as "the great winner of the pandemic" (Americas Quarterly, 2021). The health emergency due to COVID-19 which was declared throughout South America revealed the absence of material incentives, institutional mechanisms, and symbolic points of reference for coordinated regional action which led to each country individually securitising its national agenda (Frenkel & Dasso, 2021; Dalponte, 2021).

However, prior to the widespread declaration of lockdown measures, the unwelcome interdependence of the extent and distribution of organised crime at the borders drew the attention of the public safety bodies in several countries. It is worth noting that pragmatism in border security at an operational and technical level had previously shown some success in dealing with the risks and shared threats from the possible effects of environmental or seismic disasters. This type of intermestic security occurs, therefore, as a response to the complex interdependence of the threats in border areas where there is greater scope for organised crime to achieve significant economic penetration and damage, in addition to the key facility to set up transnational criminal networks, using local and regional aspects of the economy and society.

It should be noticed that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the South American governments were undergoing major social protests that led to a militarisation of internal security (Cepeda-Másmela, Chapter 12). In Chile, Ecuador,

Colombia, and Bolivia, for example, the pandemic reinforced the militarisation of internal security through the deployment of troops, weapons of war, and subsequent border closures. Through the use of these measures, the governments tried to deal with two potentially threatening situations: public order disturbance using the political discourse of public security and the migratory movement of Venezuelan citizens who fell prey to popular mistrust as well as the spread of xenophobia in several countries of the Andean region (see Montenegro-Braz, Chapter 13).

This chapter has two objectives: (1) to account for the deregionalisation of security prior to COVID-19, and (2) to analyse intermestic security strategies engendered during the pandemic in South America. In both cases, we find the common denominator of the threats and spread of transnational organised crime at the borders, plus the decline in the politics of cooperation and regionalisation. The militarisation of internal security arises from the low level of political legitimacy of the governments which at the same time opened up old but revitalised alliances with the United States.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first deals with the discussion of the scenario of regional security and the lack of leadership in South America prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – an important juncture at which intermestic security and bilateral pragmatism emerge as concepts in the face of the scenario of insecurity and the spread of organised crime at the borders. The second section analyses the security strategies implemented by several South American countries during the pandemic, the failed attempts by Chile to foster leadership within the Forum for the Progress and Development of South America (PROSUR), and the return of US leadership in foreign affairs. Finally, some conclusions on the process that have been analysed are put forward.

Deregionalisation and Intermestic Security Initiatives Pre-COVID: The Andean Example

Regional security has been the main feature in South American Regionalism. Following the creation of UNASUR, the security agenda became the governments' main integration tool and the major opportunity for the leadership aspirations of the government of Lula da Silva towards South America. This regional approach also put an end to the preponderance of analysing the problems of the superpowers and their political involvement in their spheres of influence through conceptualisations linked to the issues of national defence and security, the balance of power, and zero-sum games (Abrahamsen & Sandor 2018). Based on these considerations and in spite of the fact that Latin America is the most violent region in the world with serious problems of new threats to international security, the academic debates around the regional issue concentrated on the wave of democratisation in the region and the "pervasive topic of reorganizing civil-military relations after periods of military dictatorship" (Domínguez, 1998; Mares, 1998), "border conflicts" (Domínguez, 2003; Mares, 2001), or "US security policy toward Latin America" (Loveman, 2006) (Weiffen & Villa, 2017, p. 2).

During the "golden age" of UNASUR, Brazil's leading role in the construction of a regional security agenda was accompanied by a series of studies that considered the challenges, successes, and expectations for future regional cooperation (Comini, 2015; Rivera, 2017; Sánchez, 2017; Toklatian & Comini, 2016; Ugarte, 2010; Vitelli, 2016). Although during the period 2005–2015, the academic research on the UNASUR Defence Council played a leading role within the regional security agenda, the lack of progress of the institution, and the limitations of the liberal-institutional-style studies revealed a "cooling off" of academic interest in the subject. Although COVID-19 exposed the limited interest of nations in promoting regional initiatives within the framework of security and defence, from 2016, it was apparent that at least 6 of the 12 members of UNASUR were already implementing formal or informal security and defence mechanisms to reduce the presence and growth of transnational organised crime at shared borders.

In this sense, although the success of the Council of South American Defence (CDS) in its early years generated a wider debate within studies of Regionalism and Security, both have rarely been studied in combination. The theory of Regional Security Complex (RSC) by Barry Buzan (2003) introduced the importance of studies by regions to explain that "the processes of securitisation and de-securitisation of States are interdependent and cannot be analysed or resolved separately" (Buzan & Waever 2003, p. 141) into the discussion of the field of security. In other words, the concerns and national security emergencies of states have created interdependent spaces due to the distinctiveness and transnationality of the new criminal threats that go beyond the traditional doctrinaire approach.

Studies of traditional security and classic geopolitics lacked theoretical meta-elements for the study of regions and regionalism without being able to define their objective. Due to these conceptual limitations and the development of multi-disciplinarity in regional security studies, there was a consensus that regions are the result of countries' foreign policy and their short-term alliances and interests. At the beginning of the 21st century, geopolitics abandoned the centrality of the region as a geographic space and incorporated within the analysis the importance of discourse and identities as central elements of regionalisation (Cabrera, 2020).

From this perspective, regions came to see themselves as variables that can be created and recreated as part of political interests. For example, before the year 2000, the region of South America did not strictly exist within the analysis of regional security studies, since the idea of South America with regard to cooperation appeared in identity terms for academics and public policy with the inception of UNASUR. At the same time, the idea of South America as a "contested region" explains, in part, why the institution it produced duly failed and why the states of South America encountered problems of alignment in military doctrine and realpolitik when constructing a joint vision of regional security during the heyday of UNASUR beyond the political will of the governments (Quiliconi & Rivera Rhon, 2019).

The speed of globalisation and the appearance of new threats to national security established the centrality of cooperation between states as a preventive and reactive measure to reduce uncertainty. For that reason, cooperation within

regional security studies in its different conceptual variants (security alliances, collective or cooperative security, security communities, security regimes, regional security complexes or hybrid governance) (Atinnà, 2005; Bailes & Cottey, 2006; Buzan, 2003; Sibilla, 2009; Villa et al., 2019) became necessary tools for the legitimisation of these collective activities through the generation of different kinds of formal and informal institutions in order to achieve their objectives of common security.

Therefore, the success of regional security in South America has depended on at least two elements: the ideological convergence of governments and an identifiable regional leadership[1] (Quiliconi & Rivera Rhon, 2019; Deciancio & Quiliconi, Chapter 1) that interact with others in specific relationships reproducing and transforming the political order in a specific region (Godehardt & Nabers, 2011).

In addition to the ideological convergence of progressive governments in South America, Brazil's leadership was fundamental for the establishment of a South American security agenda and the proposal of a model of cooperation that was different from the one applied by the United States in the region for over three decades. Included in this process are discussions regarding military doctrines, the role of women in the armed forces, and other subjects connected with the defence industry; consequently, the countries of South America showed a great interest in cooperating at a regional level, since the CDS increased its Action Plan's compliance from 25% to 86% between 2010 and 2015 (Quiliconi & Rivera Rhon, 2019). Although in practice the scheme revealed difficulties in generating a consensus regarding the definitions of national security and regional defence, the CDS opened up the prospect of generating a stand-alone proposal of regional security without the intervention of different aid programmes from the United States.

In the period following the crisis of UNASUR, in the context of a power vacuum left by Brazil in regional security, it was clear that the governing and political classes, irrespective of their ideological composition, were incapable of exercising an effective strategic political leadership. They could not free themselves from the machinations of power and neo-corporative interests of the military institutions in their respective countries. The dependent connections with the United States and the limited autonomy of countries in the fight against drug trafficking created more heterogeneity and differences than proximities at the level of identity and cooperation.

The region lacked institutional responses and a paymaster to tackle regional security policies. This became especially clear in the Andean sub-region which urgently required pragmatic actions and cooperation concentrating on the border level. These territories had to deal simultaneously with sensitive matters of public security, national defence, drug trafficking, and organised crime in its multiple facets. Included in this scenario are matters of foreign policy such as the political alignment of Colombia with the doctrine of United States security and the rapprochement of Venezuela with the geopolitical and military interests of Russia. This scenario of intra- and extra-regional problems and threats has created serious

border tensions between both countries and has impacted the possibility of engaging with regional security initiatives.

It is important to mention that for over 40 years that sub-region has displayed an unwelcome and complex interdependence, a product of the massive growth of transnational organised crime that represents a permanent strategic threat for the states concerned and breaks with both the classic problems of security and views on the balance of power prevalent in traditional studies of international security. These "new" hybrid or multi-dimensional threats have become the main reason for seeing the Andean sub-system as a complex theoretical jigsaw that includes the criminal economy of drug trafficking, foreign policy, geopolitics, and strategic intelligence systems (Rivera Vélez & Sansó Rubert, 2021).

With the institutional vacuum left by UNASUR and the absence of any operational coordination, from 2017, pragmatic bilateralism was pursued in the region on account of the multi-dimensional dangers and effects that organised crime represents for the states and societies of South America. There was a shift from a process of deregionalisation to the construction of intermestic security.

Intermestic security is based on the formulation of border strategies and agreements by means of regular and informal cooperation, established at a technical political level rather than based on formal regional institutions. In contrast to policies of border security, intermestic security resembles the interdependence of mutual security threats and focuses its actions on the generation of activities and operations between two bordering countries or in those neighbouring territories with strategic bilateral interests, as in the case of Andean countries that are called Areas of Border Integration (*Zonas de Integración Fronteriza* or ZIF).[2] The cooperation mechanisms include the creation of binational ministerial offices in border areas, the establishment of special missions for the exchange of information, the increase of joint operations in the face of the new transnational threats, and binational border patrols. These activities constitute recent facets of cooperation which is not moderated or organised by any coordinating body of regional integration.

At the same time, the objective of intermestic security is to increase measures of mutual trust through dialogue, transparency, information sharing and the coordination of activities to confront the joint cross-border risks and threats, including the possible impacts of environmental or seismic disasters. Due to the pragmatism and coordination at an operational level, presidential diplomacy plays a secondary role since it does not have any direct influence on coordination and relations between participants. The key to these shared spaces is the delegation of responsibilities from the presidency to the ministerial authorities or secretariats of state, whose sectoral governance over security and defence makes political sustainability possible through crises and political differences.

The originality and resilience of intermestic security acknowledge the weaknesses of border policies founded on traditional doctrines of national security and represent a new way of countering the porosity and concentration of illicit markets at South American borders. The aim of the encounters between ministers is to set up a forum at the highest level to focus on

a framework vision that articulates the binational interests and approaches in a single direction (…) in which directives can be revised, evaluated, and communicated in order to take forward projects and programs that are aimed at strengthening the integration and the development of the two nations.

(Cancillería de Colombia, 2012, p. 10)

Following the Peace Treaty between Ecuador and Peru[3] that marked the beginning of bilateral ~~meetings~~ focused on border issues, these meetings took on a new interest with the creation of an institution that puts emphasis on a series of topics that had the aim of dealing with the problematic of the ZIF and not exclusively the problems of national defence. As part of this initiative, it was decided to incorporate within binational cooperation the exchange of operational and intelligence information in relation to drug trafficking and shared assessments of the porosity of their borders within a bilateral structure created at the beginning of 2000 known as the Binational Border Commission – COMBIFRON. Included in this initiative was a view of human security with the establishment of development policies at the common border in matters related to infrastructure and communications, environment, health and education, culture and heritage, as well as economic and commercial issues.

The intermestic security formed between Ecuador and Peru includes cooperation on two important aspects; a focus that would later be replicated between Ecuador and Colombia. The first central aspect relates to the exchange of information and intelligence, as well as the building of mutual confidence between the armed forces through the COMBIFRON. The second aspect established the planning and execution of operations in border areas on several issues relating to insecurity and criminal activity such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, illegal mining, and arms trafficking. These assignments established a flexible structure and basic rules agreed and approved beforehand via meetings between authorities at deputy minister rank in the areas of security and defence.

The success of these activities led other Andean and South American countries to emulate the flexible coordination structure of intermestic security, established initially in the cases referred to above. In 2017, for example, Peru and Chile set up binational offices for the coordination of operations and the exchange of information relating to organised crime and illegal cross-border markets. By the same token, Peru and Bolivia established additional binational offices copying the operational planning model and the exchange of information regarding organised crime from previous cooperation initiatives. For example, point 27 of the declaration from June 25, 2019, on the 5th Peru-Bolivia Binational Ministerial Meeting, stressed

the importance of cooperation in order to avert and confront activities of transnational organised crime, in particular organisations dedicated to drug trafficking, the illegal trafficking of arms, munitions and explosives, illegal mining and deforestation, people smuggling and trafficking, vehicle theft, and common border crimes, amongst others; at the same time strengthening

judicial cooperation. They resolved to foster and strengthen both national and joint strategic activities in the fight against smuggling, as an effective mechanism to protect the economy of our countries.

(Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la
República Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2019)

Similarly, since the end of 2010, Chile and Argentina held meetings of ministers that have reproduced the working methodology by establishing joint operations and patrols at the borders, binational surveillance of illegal border crossings, and other defence activities connected with the missions undertaken towards the Antarctic.

It is clear, and relatively novel, that intermestic security is underpinned by a low level of formal foreign policy institutionality, by a high level of dialogue, and by the absence of a defined regional leadership. This deficit of political leadership, which generally makes use of extensive media resources, has also revealed the institutional and operational weaknesses of the countries that look upon the intermestic factor as an opportunity for border cooperation based on the unsolicited interdependence fostered by cross-border criminal threats. On the other hand, this type of cooperation has succeeded in standardising and harmonising indicators of binational security, a task that saw some progress within UNASUR but did not succeed among the national institutions that were linked to the regional ones.

Intermestic security has made important advances that would not have been possible within the regional framework. For example, the analysis of binational meetings held in South America identified that the principal illegal markets that pose the greatest threats for the concerned countries are:

- Illegal trafficking in drugs and chemical precursors
- Illegal mining and deforestation
- Trafficking in arms, munitions, and explosives
- Trafficking in hydrocarbons
- People smuggling and illegal immigrant trafficking
- Contraband of goods

The pragmatic transformation that several countries made towards intermestic security also revealed other phenomena. First, the unsatisfactory results from using the armed forces in internal security in relation to the increase in organised crime. The case of Brazil is emblematic because it relates to misguided internal political decisions which instead of enhancing institutional synergy resulted in a lack of coordination in the institutionality of public security that obliged states to consider and strengthen cooperation with their neighbours. Second, although Brazil abandoned its regional leadership in UNASUR, the country did not abandon its strategic interest within the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), since the organisation already established common initiatives regarding border security, transnational organised crime, and citizen insecurity. In comparison with

the Andean Community, MERCOSUR has succeeded in maintaining a limited range of coordinated actions in security and defence.

The absence of intermestic security can also be taken as an additional component for the growing number of security and humanitarian crises. Venezuela exemplifies isolationism and limited incidence of pragmatic bilateral relations in order to cooperate in the fight against organised crime. The political crisis in that country and the frontier tensions with Colombia are well known; in fact, their diplomatic relations have been suspended for three years at a time of serious humanitarian upheaval involving the forced migration of thousands of people from that country that have placed on alert the institutions concerned with humanitarian assistance and border security in several South American countries. Without binational cooperation, the escalation of organised crime activities at the borders is indirectly made easier, corruption is increased, and a reduced state presence persists in territories with high levels of conflict (see Legler, Chapter 6).

In sum, prior to the declaration of the health emergency, the states had abandoned regional security initiatives due to the crisis in UNASUR to concentrate on the security of their borders to face the spread and growing threat of organised crime. Although these initiatives already indicated some attempts by governments to minimise cooperation with their neighbours and to focus their relations towards other countries such as China or the United States, the rise of violence and the increase in criminality at the borders obliged the states to maintain their bilateral relations. The question that arises from this situation is whether intermestic security will be maintained. It is hard to provide an answer given the absence of a regional body that articulates interests, identities, and political heterogeneities. Nevertheless, the increase in criminality and the results shown in recent years suggest that the countries of South America will continue to reinforce these kinds of bilateral strategies over time.

Regional Security During COVID-19: The Return of US Leadership and the Militarisation of Security

Since Nixon's presidency, the "War on Drugs" programme has been accompanied by a constant injection of investments to Latin America focused on the modernisation of equipment, infrastructure, technical assistance for the military and the police, courts, and judges for the fight against drug trafficking and nowadays to transnational organised crime. The disparate interpretations of the US hegemonic role made it stressful to construct a security community in the region that was autonomous and had its own identity.

The return of neoliberal agendas in many South American countries was accompanied by the enhancement and return of US cooperation, mainly in matters connected with drug trafficking and organised crime. In the case of Ecuador, for example, the interest of the US State Department in strengthening bilateral relations in security is important for three reasons. First, because the United States sought to reduce Ecuador's dependence on China with regard to military weapons bought and supplied between 2008 and 2016 during the Correa government.

Second, because the United States is keen on implementing the loans of the International Development Finance Corporation in relation to video surveillance and thereby reducing the connection of the Integrated Security Service (known as ECU 911) with Chinese technology (Quiliconi & Rivera Rhon, 2021; González Jauregui & Tussie, Chapter 3). Third, because Ecuador recently increased its role in the drug trafficking network, moving from a transit country to a cocaine producer country (Rivera Rhon & Bravo, 2020), which results in the United States injecting further amounts of financial capital and resources to reduce the drug supply that originates from Ecuador and ends up in the United States.

During the worst period of the pandemic, the United States took the opportunity to re-legitimise its hegemonic role with the provision of beds, mobile hospitals, masks, and other equipment to enhance the work of health policies initiatives in the region (Deciancio & Quiliconi, Chapter 1). Although China applied an intense diplomatic effort with vaccines, at the same time, the United States established a geopolitical image as vaccine provider and facilitator; in fact, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken undertook a series of visits to make his presence felt in the face of the keen competition from Chinese cooperation in supplying a good deal of hospital equipment and vaccinations. The policy of President Biden has marked a move away from his predecessor Donald Trump in that he understands that the region is taking on an increasingly important role between the two powers and that the abandonment in recent years of the Latin American "back yard" had provided many opportunities for China to increase its influence on that continent (González Jauregui & Tussie, Chapter 3). That United States discourse has been exploited by recent South American countries of the right and centre-right to legitimise that hegemony and support the injection of new funds for cooperation in security and defence for the region.

The situation described here developed in a context in which several South American countries shifted politically towards neoliberal and liberalising governments that had to operate in a scenario of high internal polarisation and a low level of interest in matters of regional cooperation. However, although the states chose to strengthen relations with their neighbours and rely on the local pragmatism of intermestic security, it should be noted that, prior to the major lockdown between March and April 2020, there were already signs of neoliberal governments' interest in strengthening relations with the United States and returning to a military approach to security. This shift was based on two major considerations: The first of these concerns the political instability within the South American states that led to demonstrations, major clashes, and the consequent militarisation of social protests before and during COVID-19 in Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Peru (Cepeda-Másmela, Chapter 12). The second consideration, which was also of a political nature relating to the democratic stability of the governments, led to many police forces neglecting their criminal intelligence work to concentrate on "inquiries" or intelligence on opposition political parties, union leaders, social organisations, or civil groups classified as "threats to democracy".

The history of South America is beset with examples that show that the region still has weak democratic institutions and uses the armed forces as a

political solution in the face of governance inadequacies. It is a practice that is used to benefit from the discipline, hierarchy, organisation, and, above all, the non-belligerence of the military when faced with crises, social upheaval, and urgent decrees of states of exception or national emergency. However, not all of the examples are positive from the point of view of intermestic security that can be used for the political interests of parties or governments with a particular ideological affinity. Their use, with the political bias of intermestic security, weakens the pragmatic interest in cooperation in the face of transnational organised crime.

The cases of Argentina and Ecuador faced with the political conflict in Bolivia in 2019 demonstrated their hidden discretionary powers in matters of public policy and the ideological orientation of the then governments of Mauricio Macri and Lenín Moreno. These former presidents are accused of having authorised, by means of informal executive decisions, the sending of arms and crowd control equipment to suppress the civilian population of Bolivia which was experiencing a period of internal upheaval. Both cases are currently being investigated by the legislative and judicial bodies in the three concerned countries (BBC, 2021; DW, 2021a). On the other hand, it was clear that several states took advantage of the pandemic to deal with Venezuelan migration and reposition themselves at the borders (Montenegro-Braz, Chapter 13). For example, in 2021 Peru mobilised "about fifty armoured motorised Army units along the border with Ecuador in an attempt to control illegal Venezuelan immigrants" (DW, 2021b). In Colombia, President Ivan Duque increased the deployment of 87,000 troops, extended compulsory military service by three months, and authorised the joint patrolling of urban centres between the army and the police.

With the collapse of the Council for South American Defence of UNASUR, since 2019, a space parallel to the security and defence councils has been pursued within the new Forum for the Progress and Development of South America (PROSUR). This body arose as an intergovernmental forum with a low level of authority, protecting the countries' sovereignty. It resulted in agreements of minor significance, and in addition, it lacks any obvious leadership (see Nolte, Chapter 7). With regard to security and defence, sectoral plans in security, fighting crime, and defence have been established. By consensus of the countries involved, it was agreed that Chile (2019) and Colombia (2020–2021) would lead the sectoral agendas of PROSUR. Unfortunately, even though Chile sought to position itself as a leader of these agendas, its lack of legitimacy and proximity to the problem of crime in the Andean countries has made it difficult to approve the road maps in both areas in over two years of existence.

This situation has arisen for two reasons: First, the superficiality of the cooperation has determined that the forum only accomplishes dialogues for coordination and cooperation between the Ministries of Defence, subject to the internal legislation of each member country. Second, the strategy created by Chile of restarting cooperation with ineffective foreign policy mechanisms like the Council of Defence Ministers of the Americas of the Organization of American States (OAS) has made it difficult for the armed forces of the member countries to be associated

with the planning of PROSUR and to decide to strengthen bilateral agendas. In this sense, the armed forces have learned from their experience that summit diplomacy, meetings, and pompous declarations are ineffective when binational security emergencies arise that need to be dealt with by those military institutions that are subject to the performance outcomes and the political demands of governments.

Regarding the coordination of agendas on security and the fight against organised crime, the focus placed on dialogue and the exchange of experiences is destined to commit the same mistakes of the recent past: to amplify a political presence and minimise the inclusion of the public security technical bodies in that process. It is for that reason, that, in a relatively "autonomous" way, there are parallel road maps such as those created in the Police Forces of America (AMERIPOL) that include matters to do with crime prevention, information exchange, and informal contacts for the management of border issues. The insistence on summits and meetings with governmental political representatives suggests that the agendas are doomed to failure, as has happened in the Council for Public Security of UNASUR.

In summary, PROSUR does not have the technical or operational support of the armed services or the police forces, nor has it succeeded in distancing itself from the issues dealt with in the OAS since 2005. With regard to regional security, UNASUR and PROSUR are characterised by a cyclical legitimacy that depends on the will of governments for their dynamism and coordination. In contrast to the effective leadership of Brazil in UNASUR, PROSUR is lacking anything similar, so that it became difficult to establish an identity for the organisation, a coordinated agenda, or a political consensus beyond annual meetings which attract media coverage (see Nolte, Chapter 7). This absence of leadership has become a recurring pattern in the failure of regional organisations associated with security agendas in South America.

From that perspective, the absence of leadership in South American regional security, plus the lack of consensus over the establishment of a minimum of institutionalisation, and the historical and political weight of the corporate inertia of police and armed forces are factors that are leading governments to establish and strengthen bilateral or cross-border intermestic security. This situation is being taken advantage of by the United States, who find in governments with a neoliberal tinge an opportunity for the promotion of their security interests and the inclusion of several countries in its strategy for combating drug trafficking beyond its own territory.

In this respect, both the increase in people's perception of insecurity and the growth and transformation of organised crime that emphasises its volume and illegal economic activities prompted the states to modify and rethink their problems of regional cooperation. In recent years, countries chose to set up isolated initiatives at the border level. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that regional cooperation in South America was seen more as a political slogan rather than a useful tool to strengthen democracies and face transnational security challenges.

Conclusions

Before and during the pandemic, the political weight and the inertia of the conservative military tradition in national security rooted in the reality of many countries became apparent. The South American Defence Council was unable to harmonise the existing ambiguity between national defence policies and domestic programmes of public or citizen security. The recent pandemic and post-pandemic situation revealed the absence of material incentives, the lack of institutional mechanisms, a low ideological convergence, and the ineffectiveness of the symbolic and political reference frameworks for coordinated regional security action.

Throughout this analysis, we have seen how the political conjunction of several discouraging factors in pre- and post-pandemic periods have made the problem of regional integration appear like a psychological and fanciful "must-have" in the short- and medium-term. In such a diffuse scenario, the purported capacity for resilience of the regional institutions, which the South American security community wished to construct in the recent past, would have no chance. We only have to look at the complexity of the Andean sub-region where high-profile aspects of public safety have been brought together: national defence, geopolitics, drug trafficking, and organised crime in its multiple facets; which have been in existence for over 40 years and at present represent a strategic threat for democratic states. This subregional complexity represents a challenge for the theoretical approaches founded on the idea of a security community and the dilemmas relating to the balance of power prevalent in traditional security studies.

UNASUR was unable to establish a strong and effective platform with strategic leadership. It showed itself to be incapable of coordinating the security and defence agendas of the different governments and was reduced to a process that oscillated between political initiatives and the establishment of councils without any visible results for regional cooperation such as the South American Council on the World Drug Problem and the South American Council for Public Security, Justice and the Coordination of Actions Against Transnational Organised Crime. Without succeeding in reducing the doctrinal tensions between security and defence, the Council for South American Defence remained relatively active, with the responsibility for carrying out the action plans in national and regional defence.

Following the lack of progress and the break-up of UNASUR, the academic community has not been able to explain the changes in the patterns of cooperation in the absence of a regional organisation that harmonises and articulates the individual interests of the countries of South America. Nor has there been any convincing explanation regarding the politicisation of regionalism after 2015, a period that saw the start of the decline of UNASUR and the appearance of national initiatives that were diffuse, bilateral, and extra-regional.

The concept of intermestic security is associated with bilateral pragmatism and appears as a renewed concept intended as a response to the drawing up of the security and defence agendas between neighbouring South American countries since 2015. In that sense, the systemic approaches appear to be the most appropriate

for any analysis because they are flexible and include the cooperative and contingent interactions between states without depending on "regional institutions" to explain the inner South American cooperation initiatives after UNASUR. This approach can also encompass the often-criticised ambiguities of bilateral activities in security matters of countries that, like Argentina and Ecuador, collaborated at times of domestic political crisis such as the events in Bolivia in 2019.

By means of a flexible institutionality, together with a presidential presence or a specific delegation to the ministries responsible for sectoral competencies, bilateral cooperation in security and defence has strengthened the construction of intermestic practicalities in the region after the fall of UNASUR. Shared perceptions and needs regarding multi-dimensional threats like transnational organised crime currently serve as an effective platform for exchange and cooperation between several countries that will be resilient after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In retrospect, the efforts expended over a little more than eight years by UNASUR, and the South American Defence Council represent incomplete attempts to harmonise individual policies, avoid the dispersion of political efforts, and collaborate over the allocation of economic resources from expenditure or public investment. To date, there has been no assessment or evaluation of the financial cost of what it meant to administer and operate UNASUR for the region. However, on the specific subjects of defence and security, it is astonishing how the integrative initiatives were abandoned on account of the political weight and unacknowledged influence of the doctrinaire inertia and conservatism of the national armed services and police forces in many South American countries.

It is equally astonishing to observe the political incapacity of the governing classes and supporters, especially of so-called progressivism who, regardless of their ideological composition, achieved such poor results over the effective strategic political conduct of the military and police institutions in the integration process. The capacity of the military institutions to use the machinations of power and defend their corporate interests in the public and foreign policy of our countries is well known. Regionally we have learned nothing from the lessons of the history of partial guardianship and of the poor results of democratic governance regarding cooperation in defence and security.

Notes

1 Regional power or leadership involves the surrender by a state of public resources, assuming the costs of integration in the construction plans of collective interests with the support of regional organisations and accepting regional representation in multilateral fora through the coordination of rules, regulations, and policies (Van Langenhove et al., 2016; Mattli, 1999).

2 The Areas of Border Integration (ZIF) establishes a free movement of their citizens, commerce, and planning policies at the borders of the Andean Community members which includes Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru (*Decisión 563*, Cartagena Agreement).

3 Ecuador and Peru fought an undeclared war between January and February 1995. The military confrontation ended through the mediation of the United States, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil as guarantor powers. In 1998, the Peace and Demarcation Treaty

was signed, putting an end to five decades of diplomatic tension and national defence brought about by the unilateral interpretation of the border demarcation in the north of Peru and the south of Ecuador.

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