

# **THE SOUTH AMERICAN REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX: POSSIBILITIES OF THEORETICAL REVIEW BASED ON THE POLARITY VARIABLE (2006-2020)**

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## **SUMMARY**

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Regional security complexes (RSCs) are social constructions derived from interdependence relationships established from interactions between material and ideational variables. However, like other readings of a conjunctural Nature, The Theory of regional security complexes (RCTs) requires continuous effort to update. That said, after almost two decades since the presentation of its most developed version (2003) and considering, in this period, multisectoral dynamics that acted in shaping the regional security agenda, would a context of variable geometry of power be able to impact the structural nature of the RSC of South America? Therefore, between 2006 and 2020, we evaluated elements that allowed us to test the hypothesis that South America would be the first empirical case of a new category of RSC, using as methodology a diachronic comparative case study. We conclude that this RSC would not have transposed, so far, regarding polarity, its original epistemology.

Keywords: Regional security complexes; South America; polarity; Brazil; defense capabilities

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## INTRODUCTION

The theme of security, traditionally, occupies a prominent role in international relations because it is closely linked to several aspects related to the survival of this unit of analysis par excellence (although not exclusive) in the area of Strategic Studies and which first defined it: the state. The concept of security, in this way, was built from the peace of Westphalia (1648) and as expected, reflected, in a great way, the dynamics arising from the statocentric system that was then born.

This approach-which broadly emphasizes the military nature of threats and the primacy of state agency - figured as the main explanatory pattern of the security dynamics of the international system until the end of the Cold War. However, after the bipolar order ended, other themes and actors began to assume unprecedented prominence. And in a scenario of still undefined contours and little prognosticable, thus giving a new format to the security agenda of states for which the threats are notably more diffuse, going far beyond the traditional political-military dimension.

This framework, in turn, accentuated the inevitability of a pressing attention to the epistemological (how knowledge is constructed) and ontological (how actors build the world and give it purpose) aspects that shaped it, and still shape it, since, to adapt to the challenges imposed by the complexity of the post-Cold War global scenario, with regard to security, the analyzes demanded alternative theoretical-conceptual parameters to the so-called traditional or Westphalian perspective (Buzan et al. 1998).

It was in this sense that the Copenhagen School (Copenhagen Peace Research Institute), created in 1985, made a notable contribution, first, by proposing the idea of securitization from the expansion of the concept of security, based on the premise that threats are not only military in nature. They can also come from the political, environmental, economic and/or societal areas, each with its own dynamics that, not necessarily, will have its in the state (QUEIROZ, 2012).

The other important original contribution of this group - and the one that interests us here-stemmed from the recognition of the importance of the dynamics that occur at an intermediate level of analysis. To this end, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, two of the leading exponents of the Copenhagen School, presented the concept of regional security complexes (RSCs). Its basic premise assumes that in post-Cold War World

International Relations in the area of security give rise to greater autonomy and importance for the dynamics occurring on a regional scale (BUZAN and WÆVER, 2003).

Moreover, geographical proximity proved to be a relevant variable since sectoral threats, according to this perception, tend to move more easily between smaller distances. For this reason, Buzan and Wæver (2003, 27) point out, considering security relations from a subsystem level of analysis, located between the global and the local, is what gives great analytical power to The Theory of regional security complexes (RCTs) since regional peculiarities (especially the concerns of states with the material capacity and intentions of their counterparts) have become more easily distinguishable from the systemic security agenda of the Cold War.

In short, the central idea is that one has a Regional security complex (RSC) when the main perceptions and concerns regarding the security of those who are part of a territorially coherent space are so interconnected that such problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or solved separately, according to Buzan and Wæver (2003) is the scenario in which South America is framed, our universe of analysis. After these initial considerations, it is necessary to highlight an important methodological addendum that, by its nature, was decisive in the definition of the objectives outlined for the article. Like other theoretical-conceptual readings of a recognized conjunctural nature, we see, therefore, that the TCRS-by mirroring externalities arising from an international system provided with great dynamism-demands a continuous effort to update its premises in order to provide the researcher with tools that offer greater precision in the investigation of actors and forces that shape the object(s) of study.

That said, almost two decades have passed since the presentation of the most recent and developed version of the TRSC and, considering, in this period, the effects spillover of multisectoral dynamics that acted in shaping the South American security agenda, this is the question to which this study seeks answers: would a context of variable geometry of power be able to impact the structural nature of the RSC of South America to the point of suggesting a theoretical revision?

To answer it, the article is divided into three sections. In the first part, we discuss the epistemological structure of the RSC, in general, and the RSC of South America, in particular, as originally formulated. More precisely, we describe the elements determinants in the formation of

RSC: power distribution (polarity); patterns of friendship/enmity among RSC actors; and agency impacts of actors external to the region. In the second part, we analyze some paradigmatic events that occurred in South America and their possible implications on the conceptual structure of this CRS from the analysis of our dependent variable: polarity.

From what the inferences obtained suggest, in the third and last part of the article we present, then, some reflections about possible trends of change regarding the nature of the RSC of South America in comparison to its original taxonomy. Therefore, the choice of the period between 2006 and 2020: a broad enough time frame that would allow observing - from the conceptual maturation and empirical evidence - reconfigurations in the structural ontology of the RSC.

Finally, before proceeding to the analysis itself, it is urgent to emphasize that we do not intend to enter (or thicken the) discussion about criticisms regarding the explanatory capacity of the proposed model. Our investigative intent is revisionist regarding the ontological aspects of the TRSC-more specifically the variable polarity - which presupposes considering it a set of propositions that meets principles that support its validity, such as: consistency, generality (scope), plausibility and testability.

Based on this premise, we will also seek to amalgamate contributions from authors who have been contributing to this revisionist effort such as Hirst (2003), Tanno (2003), Cepik (2005), Queiroz (2012), Fuccille and Rezende (2013), Teixeira Júnior and Silva (2015) and Rezende (2016). Thus, in an attempt at synthesis, we will evaluate conjunctural and structural elements that allow us to test the hypothesis - through the exploration of diachronic similarities and differences - that South America would be the first empirical case of a new category of RSC.

## 1- THE THEORY OF REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEXES

In the seminal work *“People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era”* (1991, p. 198), Barry Buzan presents the RSC as *“groups of states whose main perceptions and concerns security issues are so intertwined that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved separately.”* However, with the enlargement beyond the political-military dimension and the concomitant consideration of non-state actors in security studies, the revision of the concept became essential in order to extend its analytical capacity and

thus adapt it to the new theoretical-conceptual structure proposed by the Copenhagen School. Therefore, to fulfill this purpose, Buzan and Wæver (2003, p. 44) redefined it as “*a set of units*” whose main *securitization and/or desecuritization processes* they are so interconnected that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or solved in isolation.”

Even so, in practice, it is perceived that the RSC are commonly conceived from the state as the base unit of analysis, because they are present in all sectors as central actors, a regularity that does not occur with other ontological elements such as, for example, an ethnic grouping, which may be important in the societal sector, but not necessarily in the environmental and/or economic. Therefore, the authors used the definition of a region as a territorially coherent space composed of two or more states, since the regular presence of this unit of analysis, in any sector that is discussed, extensively provides consistency and density to the model. Therefore, if states structure the international system, the regional level will maintain its analytical power, especially in those sectors where adjacency is a relevant factor in security dynamics.

### 1.1 - Building Regional Security Complexes

The RSC are social constructions derived from the interdependence relations that are established between its units from symbiotic interactions between material and ideational variables such as beliefs, identities, material capacities, distribution/perception of power, anarchy, polarity, which gives the model greater analytical reach.

Recognizing, therefore, the need to add to the subsystemic study possible impacts of the distribution of power between states at different levels of analysis—since the RSC can be intensely impacted by the interests of these actors—the Copenhagen School incorporated into the model a “taxonomy of polarities” by conceiving three possibilities: the existence of superpowers, Great Powers, powers and regional powers (BUZAN; WÆVER 2003, p. 34)<sup>3</sup>. After all, points out Buzan (2004, 02), polarity is a very

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3 The authors qualify as regional power those states considered important, however, limited in their capacity to act to their immediate surroundings. Countries such as India, Israel, Iran, Brazil and Turkey are in this category. The great powers, on the other hand, are those that have significant material resources that allow them to exert influence not only in their vicinity, but also in other regions, however, not on a planetary scale. China and Russia are allocated in this category. The superpower, on the other hand, can more easily transcend the constraints imposed by geography, in which case they frame the USA (BUZAN and WÆVER 2003, p.30-37).

influential variable in theories that seek to explain the functioning of the international system.<sup>4</sup>

However, there is recognition that even the regional dynamics maintain a substantial degree of autonomy in relation to the security standards established by the agency of these actors. Therefore, it is verified as one of the distinctive characteristics of a RSC the fact that the Securitization/desecuritization processes and, consequently, the degree of interdependence in security is notably more intense between the units that compose it than between these and the actors external to the RSC (BUZAN; WÆVER 2003, p.04). Once the strong introspective characteristic of the relationships that define a RSC has been identified, another variable emerges that is intrinsically linked to it and equally important in this structure: the relationships between its units from the interactive processes of identity formation, an aspect largely anchored in the tronomic typology of enemies, friends and rivals based, respectively, on the images derived from Hobbes', Kant and Locke (WENDT 1999, p.249).

Another fundamental point, and the one that interests us for the purposes of the article, is the classification of RSC according to the distribution of power between their units (polarity). According to the Copenhagen School the RSC can be of the standard type (standard) or centered (centered) (BUZAN; WÆVER 2003, pp. 55-56). The Standard type RSC maintain an anarchic structure defined by the existence of regional powers whose relationships determine the dynamics of security in the space of the subregion, either through rivalry and / or the sharing of interests.

In turn, in the centered RSC we find three main configurations, all having as a principle the existence of a center of power. In the first two cases the dynamics revolve around either the presence of a great power (Russia in the case of the post-USSR RSC) or a superpower (USA in the North American RSC). In these two a unipolar structure prevails, since the regional powers (Ukraine, in the first case, and Canada and Mexico, in the second), given the indisputable prominence of the great or superpower, do not have the necessary power resources to establish themselves as alternative poles.

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4 For Buzan (2004, p. 04) polarity is directly linked to identity because, as he points out, "the status of great power is itself an element of identity which shapes how certain states see themselves". Thus, polarity must be analyzed from a social context, and not purely material.

The third case of a centered RSC occurs when the region assumes such ontological density, a result of a high degree of institutionalization, to the point of recognizably acting with the qualities of a unitary agent. The European Union is an emblematic case presenting itself, at the same time, as a highly institutionalized region in the form of a security community and, as an IR actor, as a great power.

It should be noted that the authors also suggest a fourth category of RSC of the centered type, however, at the time the typology was conceived, given the absence of empirical evidence, it only appeared as a theoretical construct. This is the Unipolar centered RSC, being the pole a regional power (BUZAN; WÆVER 2003, P.62).

Thus, based on the propositions of the Copenhagen School, we can synthesize the structuring of a RSC from three main types of relationships: 1) the distribution of power among the units of the region (polarity), which presupposes an anarchic structure composed of two or more autonomous units; 2) the patterns of friendship/enmity between the actors of the RSC; 3) the power relations with actors external to the region, especially with respect to the superpower and great powers.

## 1.2 The South American Regional Security Complex

According to the typology originally proposed by the Copenhagen School, South America is a RSC of the standard type, marked by the presence of more than one regional power. In addition, it is important to emphasize that this RSC is composed of two subregional structures: the security subcomplex of the southern Cone formed by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, and the security subcomplex of the northern Andean that brings together Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and Guyana.

Regarding the Southern Cone, the subregion proved to be sensitive not only for the countries that integrate it, but, in general, for the balance of power in South America. Throughout history, international relations in this space have experienced alternations between periods of antagonisms, conflicts, mistrust and, more recently, cooperation, having in Brazil-Argentina relations the main defining geopolitical vector of its dynamics in security. After all, these actors polarized the dispute for regional leadership and areas of influence.

However, from the mid-1980s, with the resumption of civilian

governments, space opened up for a deep tightening in these bilateral relations, drastically reducing the possibilities of conflict between these actors. More concrete signs of this *rapprochement* they date back to 1985, when the then presidents, José Sarney and Raul Alfonsín, ratified the Foz do Iguaçu Act, an initiative that aimed to bring the two countries closer through industrial complementarity and technological cooperation. From the subsequent agreements, What would become Mercosur six years later was drawn.

Consequently, such *rapprochement* has led to rearrangements in the main axis defining the patterns of friendship-enmity in South America, culminating in a paradigmatic structural change in the security subcomplex of the Southern Cone regarding the perceptions of reciprocal threats by the once rivals, a key point for the reformulation of the subregional security agenda. Therefore, the Treaty of Asunción, the institutional framework of Mercosur, was fundamental in cooling the geopolitical rivalries between the two poles of the platinum subsystem by increasing commercial exchange between them and with the other two original members of the bloc, Uruguay and Paraguay, in this new context of international relations in the Southern Cone.

It can be seen, then, from this framework, a substantial improvement in the measures of mutual confidence having as a starting point the progressive desecuritization of issues previously considered vital in the subregional security agenda, with emphasis on the abdication of the use of nuclear energy for military purposes. This environment of greater transparency was materialized through a model of cooperation unprecedented in the region, embodied in initiatives such as the creation of the common system of Accounting and control of nuclear materials (SCCC).

In this direction, Brazil and Argentina, architects of this architecture *sui generis*, created: a scheduled agenda of presidential visits to its nuclear facilities; signed protocols on immediate information and reciprocal assistance in cases of nuclear accidents (1986); joined the International Atomic Energy Agency and, with it, ratified a Tripartite agreement, in 1991, submitting to the inspection of all activities involving the creation of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for accounting and control of nuclear materials (ABACC); established a working group focused on scientific cooperation in nuclear research for peaceful purposes; and, on the Brazilian initiative, presented a project to create a zone of peace



and cooperation in the South Atlantic, enshrining the principle of non-introduction of nuclear weapons in this space. As José Sarney declared in a speech given on the installation of the Superior Council for Nuclear Policy (Cspn), on January 24, 1989, "Brazil-Argentina cooperation in the nuclear area has gained new directions, [...] mutual mistrust and suspicion were disarmed" (BRASIL / MRE, 1989, p.03). These words ratify the consolidation of the cooperative identity that has come to preside over relations between the two countries from a growing convergence between regional integration and security policy. Therefore, this scenario meets the perception that in situations where identities between states are perceived as positive there is a greater propensity for cooperation, since these patterns of behavior, when consolidated, create relatively stable images between these actors. If the Southern Cone has opted for the path of integration and the strengthening of mutual trust, the security subcomplex of the Andean North, for its part, keeps evident the reminiscences of a past of conflicts and rivalries in a scenario aggravated by problems of structural order that transcend the borders of the subcomplex itself. There are still resentments arising from territorial disputes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries involving Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Guyana and Ecuador (BUZAN and WÆVER, 2003, p.315). In addition, the subcomplex has serious political - institutional weaknesses, one of the main factors responsible for making it a power vacuum, which has been occupied by organized crime networks, responsible for the insertion of the subregion in the global illicit market. Thus, given the common systemic weaknesses of the Andean states, the process of state building it ends up assuming an important security dimension - an essential component for the maintenance of regional order-in this context in which the

the existence of weak or bankrupt States is becoming increasingly important.

Having presented the main defining characteristics of the RSC of South America, we will, finally, go to the main objective of this article: to seek inferences, both structural and conjunctural in nature, that allow us to evaluate a taxonomic revision of this space within the ontological structure of the TCRS from one of its defining elements, in this case, the polarity and, consequently, the role played by Brazil in this structure.

## 2 - A PROPOSAL FOR THEORETICAL REINTERPRETATION BASED ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER AMONG THE RSC UNITS IN SOUTH AMERICA

When we analyze polarity as an ontological element of IR, a question from which we cannot refrain when looking for references capable of indicating possibilities of distribution of power and, therefore, of influence of states in a region, is, in Weberian terms: how to measure the capacities of these actors to assert their will, even against resistance? (WEBER, 1992, p.152). Although there are many difficulties inherent to such a task due to power being a relative quantity, it is important to select reference variables, even if only as a road map indicative of possibilities, either of the effective power of the countries or of potential resources that can be converted into available power capacities.

Before, however, it is urgent to weave a brief semantic addendum important for the purposes of the text. In this case, the distinction between polarity and polarization, undeniably close concepts, however, with distinct ontologies, as we will realize over the next few pages. Thus, Buzan (2004, p.4) explains that while polarity refers to the number of powers in the international system, polarization refers to the possible coalitions formed between such powers. Take, by way of illustration, the formatting of the international system in 1914: admittedly multipolar in terms of the number of powers, in terms of the formation of coalitions it was bipolar since, in short, these powers were either part of the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France and Russia) or the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy).

In addition, in the RI it was agreed to associate power with the list of assets derived from the material capabilities of the units of the international system, thus evidencing the protagonism of the military dimension. Concomitantly, the variable 'power', closely connected to the ideas of strength and capacity for achievement and transformation, has become, as pointed out by Gehre and Degaut (2018, 747) and Rezende (2016, p.275), a modalizing element of a country's vital interests in the international arena, with repercussions on the formation of self-images. After all, recognizing oneself as a pole implies prestige and, commonly, translates into practical results as an instrument of foreign policy. And in this regard, several analysts have proposed attempts to quantify power in international relations.

For illustrative purposes, let's look at two brief examples. The construction of coercive capabilities based on this conjunction of factors, it was added, in conceptual terms, in what Joel David Singer called, in 1963, the composite index of national capacity (in English, zinc - Composite Indicator of National Capability), calculated from the average of dimensionless percentages of the overall total of six components, namely: TPR = ratio of the country's total population; UPR = ratio of the country's urban population; ISPR = ratio of the country's iron and steel production; ECR = ratio of primary energy consumption; MER = ratio of military spending and MPR = ratio of number of military personnel (SINGER, 1980).<sup>5</sup> Thus:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Razão} = \text{País} / \text{Mundo} \\ \text{CINC} = \text{TPR} + \text{UPR} + \text{ISPR} + \text{ECR} + \text{MER} + \text{MPR} / 6 \end{array}$$

In a similar way, Ray Cline (1977) tried to materialize this correlation through the magnitude he called **Noticeable power (PP)**, translated into the following equation:  $PP = (C+E+M) \times (S+W)$  where **C** is the critical mass (population and territory); **E** corresponds to economic capacity; **M**, the military force; **S**, strategic objectives and finally, **W**, to the will to execute the military strategy (national political will). Cline believed that in this way it would be feasible to estimate the ability of a state to wage war and/or to impose its will in the world political and economic context.

It should be noted, however, that both the zinc and the PP do not necessarily reflect the total power of a country, since, as stated, the perception of hard - or military - power from elements of these methodologies derives from relevant attributes, however, limited in their explanatory capacity. This brings us to the fact that "*power lies at the heart of international politics, yet there is considerable disagreement about what power is and how to measure it*" (MEARSHEIMER, 2001, p.55).

In fact, a large part of the problems related to the classification of polarity in the international system is directly related to the different criteria used to obtain the power projection capacity of a country, since,

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5 The index is calculated by summing data for each of the six capacity components for a given year, converting the absolute value of each state's components to a fraction of the international total.

in this calculation, as seen, the most diverse variables can be considered such as: population (ALCOCK; NEWCOM BE, 1970, MEA R SHEI MER, 2001), territorial extension (R ATZEL, 1987, CLINE, 1977); Gross Domestic Product (HI TCH; MCKEAN, 1960); stock of strategic natural resources (KLA RE, 2012); capacity in science, technology and innovation (ZAK A R I A, 2008, CU NH A et al.. 2018), among many others. Thus, because they are qualitatively different, and considering that statistical indicators do not necessarily translate into effective power, establishing a common measure becomes a remarkably laborious effort.

The type of power to be considered as a reference also changes the result of the classification. This is because there can be a great difference in the estimation of a state's power if the decision-maker has to choose, for example, in a decision-making process, between real or immediate power (usually expressed through military capacity) and potential or latent power, which is based, above all, on geographical, demographic, environmental, cultural and economic variables.

This categorization becomes even more complex if we consider that the objective realities of power resources can be enhanced or mitigated by subjective factors resulting from processes of construction of meanings and perceptions, both on the part of those who exercise power and those who are affected by its exercise (WENDT, 1992). In other words, as Baldwin (2013) points out, power, in addition to its material attributes, is also constituted by cultural contexts in which identities take shape, which contributes to accentuate their changeable nature.

Thus, considering these addenda, but without the intention of entering the hot discussions on the subject, in this section we present some variables usually pointed out by the literature as possible indicators of power - effective or potential - so that, in the case of South America, we can verify whether the regional polarity, as originally presented in the RCT, has changed. For this, starting from the premise that currently prevails in the subcontinent, a Brazilian unipolarity, and no longer a bipolar structure, we present additional elements that test the suggestion made by Fuccille and Rezende (2013) that South America would no longer be a standard type RSC.

But, first, in view of the methodological and epistemological dissents cited - and to minimize inaccuracies arising from them - it is urgent to point out what we will consider as a pole of power for the purposes of this article.

Therefore, continuing the revisionist effort undertaken by Rezende (2016, 276) and to ensure the testability of the hypothesis, we will resort to the same conceptual references used by the author.

We have, then, the contribution of Scheller (1998) for whom a pole is that actor who, on a scale of resources in a scenario of balance of power, concentrates more than 50% of the total amount compared to the sum of what concentrate, together, the States immediately inferior to it. In addition, we will consider the weightings of Wohlforth (2009) whose understanding is that a unipole has high enough capacities to be unbalanced, since it concentrates, disproportionately, the power resources of the system of which it is part.

### 2.1 - Defining Polarities In The South American Crs

We begin the proposed analysis with data regarding regional military power. Generally (but not only) measured by military spending and the effectiveness of the armed forces, this variable is, par excellence, the greatest expression of a country's effective power because, historically, but the balance of power also tends to favor those who have the greatest military capabilities (NA ÍM, 2013, p.158-9, 166). And even if there are deviant cases that contradict this axiom by demonstrating that military force is no guarantee of supremacy, it remains relevant when generating expectations and shaping conjectures. This is because, like a system of rules (norms, laws and institutions), military force is, in the first instance, an important factor providing order (NY E, 2010). Justified the relevance and, equally, weighed the limitations of this variable, we then go to our universe of analysis: the RSC of South America and the locus occupied by Brazil in this system.

Therefore, it was decided to use three main sources of consultation for the collection of quantitative data because they are consolidated references and provide official information of the analyzed countries regarding personnel, equipment acquisition and defense budget: *International Institute for Strategic Studies* (IISS); or *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (SIPRI) and the *South American security and Defense Network* (RESDAL), active in the area, respectively, since 1958, 1966 and 2001.

## 2.2 - Defense Investments And Capabilities In The Crs Of South America (2006-2020): Evidence Of A Brazilian Unipolarity?

In search of descriptive (how) and causal (why) inferences that allow testing the suggested hypothesis and, equally, for diachronic comparison purposes (the same case in different and successive moments with the aim of identifying the influence of certain phenomena), in a first time frame, it is observed that, between 2006-2010, the total defense spending in the RSC of South America revolved around US\$ 126 billion, of which Brazil accounted for 44% of the total, followed by Colombia (17%) (10.7%), Chile (9%), Argentina (8%), Ecuador (4.5%) and Peru (4%), while the expenditures of the other countries were less than 1% of this amount (Saint-Pierre; Palacios junior, 2014, p.32).<sup>6</sup>

From these figures, there is a trend that was consolidated in subsequent years: Brazil's preponderance, in absolute terms, as the largest investor in the region in defense, however, not as a unipole, according to Scheller's (1998) perspective, for not concentrating more than 50% of the total aggregate of military capabilities. This situation even led the country to figure, in 2012, among the ten largest global investors in the sector, according to the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.

However, despite the consistent growth of military spending in the region, 2013 contrasted with previous years, mainly due to Brazil's declining performance. With expenditures in the order of US\$ 31.5 billion in 2013 - a decrease of 3.9% compared to 2012 - the country fell to the 12th position in the SIPRI ranking (2013 a). Even so, this position remains a relevant indication of the preponderance of Brazil, the only Latin American country to appear in the "SIPRI top 15"<sup>7</sup>.

However, as already argued, we start from the premise that military variables, although indispensable in the definition of polarities, are insufficient to describe, in isolation, the magnitude of a country's power. Therefore, for a broader epistemological reading, as suggested by the literature, other indicatives - quantitative and qualitative - are taken

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6 It is important to highlight that, in the case of Brazil, 59% of these expenses were used in payroll costs, 23.5% in military operations, 17.3% in investment and 0.5% in research.

7 The 15 largest defense investors in 2013 were: USA, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, UK United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, India, South Korea, Italy, Brazil, Australia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates.

into account in this calculation, some previously here cited as: territorial extension, population and GDP. Let us see, then, in the temporal sequence of this analysis, how the disposition of this set of variables was presented, in the South American context, with 2014 as the base year:

Table 1: power resource indicators  
South American countries in 2014<sup>8</sup>

Pais	População	Extensão Territorial (km <sup>2</sup> )	PIB (US\$)	Efetivo Forças Armadas	Gastos em defesa (US\$)	Gastos em defesa (% do PIB)
Argentina	41.775.000	2.780.400	404.483.000.000	77.066	4.219.130.969	1,04
Bolívia	10.598.000	1.098.580	33.616.000.000	34.078	490.559.378	1,46
*Brasil	<b>201.497.000</b>	<b>8.514.880</b>	<b>2.215.953.000.000</b>	<b>333.973</b>	<b>31.629.440.741</b>	<b>1,43</b>
Chile	17.748.000	756.100	263.115.000.000	59.031	5.511.299.093	2,09
Colômbia	49.007.000	1.141.750	387.692.000.000	268.160	8.416.388.574	2,17
Equador	16.020.000	256.370	101.322.000.000	40.242	2.773.004.221	2,74
Paraguai	6.888.000	406.750	29.550.000.000	14.284	440.752.612	1,49
Peru	30.647.000	1.285.220	216.674.000.000	78.296	2.819.591.821	1,30
Uruguai	3.418.000	176.220	58.283.000.000	22.563	650.718.647	1,12
Venezuela	30.831.000	912.050	342.067.000.000	194.744	5.567.765.086	1,63

Source: *Comparative Atlas of Defense in Latin America and the Caribbean* (2014, 08-9).

Available in: <https://www.resdal.org/index.html>

Considering the above table and, as a diachronic comparative reference, the subsequent period - 2015/16-we turn our attention, again, to two quantities susceptible to conjunctural variations and that, therefore, demand special attention: military expenditures and capabilities. We highlight, in the biennium, Venezuela, which registered a 56% reduction in its military spending<sup>9</sup>; recalling that the country depends significantly on revenues from the export of hydrocarbons, *commodities*, that suffered a strong devaluation in the period, especially oil.<sup>10</sup> It is also interesting to note that Brazil and Colombia together accounted for 62.4% of South

8 Except Guyana and Suriname.

9 IISS data (2017) indicate that Venezuelan military spending has not been audited since 2017. At the time, the military budget was estimated at US \$ 741 million and the military staff around 123 thousand military personnel. However, the Maduro regime has the support of about 220,000 members of the Bolivarian National Militia, overestimating the numbers and generating methodological inaccuracy.

10 According to Vaz (2019, 47), in Venezuela, oil production fell by 9.2%, and prices by 21%. Colombia was also hard hit. The loss of revenues associated with the reduction in oil prices in 2016 corresponded to 3% of GDP, an amount much higher than the entire defense budget of the country that year: 1.9% of GDP.

American military expenditures. However, warns Vaz (2019, P. 42), despite the undeniable concentration on the part of this dyad, the composition of expenditures heavily focused on payroll costs - a characteristic present in most South American countries-becomes a limiting factor of the influence that these countries could obtain from their military expenditures.

Still with respect to the two countries, when we analyzed defense spending as a proportion of GDP, we found that, in Brazil, there was a small retraction of 0.13% compared to 2014: from 1.43% to 1.3%. Colombia also showed a decrease in the military spending/GDP ratio, from 2.17% in 2014 to 1.94% in 2016, but still maintaining a considerable military force, 265,050 military personnel, especially when we observe such numbers as a magnitude proportional to the population and/or territorial extension of the country (RESDAL, 2016, IISS, 2017).

Additionally, for analytical purposes, we use the index developed by *Military Power Review* in which military, economic and geopolitical variables of each country, in the period between 2013/2014 and 2015/2016, are qualitatively translated into power measure. By assigning points and weights to each item - and here we do not enter discussions regarding the composition of the *ranking*, we only assume the methodology as valid-we arrived at the following comparative scale:



Table 2: Ranking of military power in South America by selected indicators during the biennium 2013/2014.

Pais	Exército (pontos)	Marinha (pontos)	Força Aérea (pontos)	Efetivos / Pop. <sup>11</sup> (pontos)	G.M. / PIB <sup>12</sup> (pontos)	EDN <sup>13</sup> (pontos)	P.E. <sup>14</sup> (pontos)	Total de pontos	Ranking
<b>*Brasil</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>1.155</b>	<b>1º</b>
<b>Colômbia</b>	97	78	321	40	50	0	45	<b>631</b>	<b>2º</b>
<b>Chile</b>	186	117	225	40	40	-10	20	<b>618</b>	<b>3º</b>
<b>Peru</b>	191	124	191	30	30	-40	40	<b>566</b>	<b>4º</b>
<b>Venezuela</b>	181	90	193	20	30	-10	40	<b>544</b>	<b>5º</b>
<b>Argentina</b>	192	106	181	10	20	-20	35	<b>524</b>	<b>6º</b>
<b>Equador</b>	60	58	108	20	40	-40	10	<b>256</b>	<b>7º</b>

Source: <http://www.militarypower.com.br/ranking.htm>. Access on 08/01/2021.

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
11 Effective / Pop. = ratio of the total strength of the three arms to the population of the country. The higher this index, the higher the score received (from 10 to 50 points).

12 Military spending in relation to Gross Domestic Product. The higher this index the higher the received score (from 10 to 50 points).

13 EDN = National Defense Strategy: long-term planning, political will, interest in strengthening the Armed Forces, war industry and National Defense policy were considered.

14 P.S. = Strategic projection: the total population, area of the country, military personnel, Gross Domestic Product, mobilization capacity and performance in UN peacekeeping missions were considered.

Table 3: Ranking of military power in South America by selected indicators during the 2015/2016 biennium

Pais	Exército (pontos)	Marinha (pontos)	Força Aérea (pontos)	Efetivos / Pop. (pontos)	G.M. / PIB (pontos)	EDN (pontos)	P.E. (pontos)	Total de pontos	Ranking	2014 para 2016
Brazil	354	175	405	10	30	10	60	1.044	1°	
Chile	240	107	243	30	30	-10	20	660	2°	 1
Peru	268	134	168	30	30	-40	40	630	3°	 1
Venezuela	261	86	216	30	20	-10	25	628	4°	 1
Colômbia	91	84	317	40	50	0	40	622	5°	 3
Argentina	259	93	89	20	30	-20	35	506	6°	

Source: <http://www.militarypower.com.br/ranking.htm>. Access on 08/01/2021.

From the indicators selected so far, some important findings can be inferred regarding the macro period between 2006 and 2016. First, in terms of power capacities, Brazil has a consolidated leadership, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in which the weight of its military apparatus stands out.<sup>15</sup> Equally important for the purposes of the hypothesis raised was the vertiginous decline of Argentina, a country that once, in military terms, rivaled Brazil, especially in the 1970s. This bipolar ontology, let us remember, was decisive in defining South America, in the light of the theoretical framework, as a standard type RSC.

As for the other relevant South American countries in power capacities-Chile, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia - there are some addenda that help us understand the composition of the scale of military power in South America between 2014 and 2016. Regarding Chile, there were continued investments in its Armed Forces, reflecting a structured planning for the long term, raising it, therefore, to the second position in the ranking. In Peru, despite the recognized budgetary limitations for defense, investments in the sector allowed the modernization and re-equipment of the three forces, such an effort was enough to position the Andean country in third place.

Venezuela, for its part, despite the serious economic and

15 The ranking of the previous bienniums has, respectively, as Main South American forces: 2005-2006: Brazil-Peru-Chile; 2007-2008: Brazil-Chile-Peru; 2009-2010: Brazil-Chile-Peru; 2011-2012: Brazil-Chile-Peru. Source: <http://www.militarypower.com.br/ranking.htm>. Access on: 18/07/2021.

institutional crisis, figured in 4th place, in part, due to investments made in previous years and foreign aid received from military powers such as Russia. Colombia, once deputy leader of the ranking, fell to 5th place in the 2014-16 biennium. The cooling of the crisis with the FARC, which resulted in an emblematic peace agreement, is pointed out as a factor inducing plans for the continued restructuring of its military apparatus.

Finally, looking at the last period of the time frame - 2018/20

- data regarding military spending in South America indicate the maintenance of Brazil's position in absolute terms. In 2018, Brazil (50%), Colombia (19%), Chile (10%) and Argentina (7.5%) accounted for about 87% of the subregion's spending. In the case of Brazil, despite the economic slowdown and restrictions on public spending, military expenditures increased by 5.1% between 2017 and 2018, and on a broader time scale, between 2009 and 2018, the increase was 17%. In this context, it is interesting to highlight, once again, the Venezuelan case. Military spending, which expanded strongly during the Hugo Chávez government (1999-2013) - thus elevating the country to the position of the second largest defense investor in the RSC in 2013-according to estimates, suffered a notable drop: 71% between 2013 and 2018 (SIPRI, 2019 b).

The situation remained practically unchanged in 2019, with military spending in the region revolving around US\$ 52.8 billion-0.2% higher than in 2018 - and Brazil accounting for 51% (US\$26.9 billion), followed by Colombia (19%) and Chile (9.8%) (SIPRI, 2020 b). It should be noted, however, that in 2020, military spending in South America fell by 2.1%, reaching a figure of US \$ 43.5 billion. Again, the reduction was largely driven by a drop in spending in Brazil: 3.1%. (SIPRI, 2021 b).

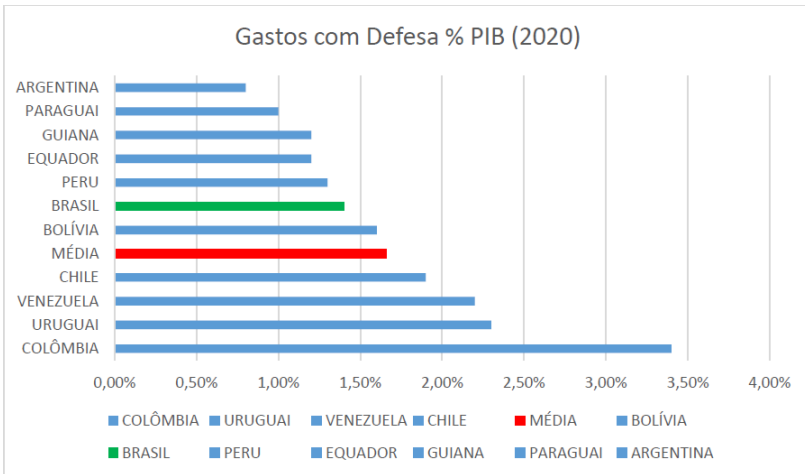
However, in the ranking overall, Brazil remained among the world's main investors in defense, occupying the 13th place, with spending in the order of US\$ 22.1 billion (R\$ 119 billion), something around 1.5% of its GDP, which may be illusory: 80% of this amount went to the payment of personnel, including pensions and pensions, a trend that has been maintained over time when we observe the disaggregated figures referring to the budget of the Armed Forces of the alleged unipolo.<sup>16</sup>

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16 Between 2007 and 2016, the figures were, on average, 88.2% in the Army, 76.9% in the Navy and 75.3% in the Air Force, with the average investment rate, respectively, of 3.7%, 12.4% and 11.4% (Lima. 2017, 68). In 2018, 81.6% of the resources were allocated for the payment of personnel, 5.4% for costing and 11.3% for investments. In 2019, personnel expenses of the Ministry of defense totaled R\$ 76.1 billion, while capital expenses (related to the purchase of equipment) were R\$ 12.8 billion.

Still looking at the average defense spending as a proportion of GDP, we observe that, in 2020, in a comparative perspective, Brazil occupied only an intermediate position in the South American scenario. According to AZEREDO JUNIOR (2023), the figures indicate that Brazil did not exceed 1.5% of GDP: a situation that has prevailed since the creation of the Ministry of Defense in 1999, and that keeps the country far from the 2% recommended as a minimum investment target in the area as currently understood by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Thus, in the scope of the RSC of South America, regarding this variable, Brazil was behind Colombia, Uruguay, Venezuela and Chile:

Figure 1: defense spending in South America as a share of GDP (2020)



Source: AZEREDO JUNIOR (2023, P.20).

These data refer us, again, to the admonition of Lima et al. (2017) and Vaz (2019) that such a situation denotes important structural limitations in terms of the ability to project power, even if, in absolute numbers, Brazil stands out. Still, in the assessment of the IISS (2021, P.379; 398), despite the well-known budgetary distortions regarding military spending in the subcontinent, Brazil, with an effective of 366,500 active military personnel, is the most capable power in its region, followed by

Colombia, with an effective of about 293,200.

## CONCLUSION

The TRSC is, admittedly, an innovative epistemological contribution in the field of study by highlighting the subsystem level of analysis as the one in which the main security dynamics occur. In this conceptual structure originally presented by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, in 2003, South America, the object of our investigation, was then defined as a standard RSC, having, as a defining vector, the dominant bipolarity between Brazil and Argentina.

However, the temporal element suggests a close look at the explanatory capacity of the RCT because it is, in its essence, a dynamic model, notably susceptible to conjunctural externalities. And, in the meantime, here is the contribution of this investigative proposal: to verify whether the polarity variable - taking into account the ontology of events that occurred between 2006 and 2020 - allows us to qualify South America as an unprecedented type of RSC: centered on a regional power, a model, then, only foreseen by Buzan and Wæver (2003, P.62) as a construct in the plane of ideas because it does not count, at that moment, on the contribution of empirical evidence. Let us now turn to the inferences drawn. Quantitatively, it was possible to observe that the variable 'military expenditures', associated with other traditional indicators of power - such as GDP, population and territorial extension

- suggest a Brazilian unipolarity in South America. However, despite the signaling towards a trend of significant concentration of material resources by Brazil, it should be noted that, according to our conceptual framework, the numbers per se they bring caveats and do not allow us to conclude that this ascending unipolarity is moving towards translating into an absolute hegemony.

As seen, throughout the time frame, Brazil was either close, or managed to concentrate more than 50% of the total amount of the subcontinent on defense spending. However, this finding was not replicated when considering the total aggregate of military capabilities, a condition, according to Scheller's (1998) perspective, considered a prerequisite for a country to be elevated to the rank of unipolo. Therefore, in view of the data presented, we are led, again, to our initial question: Would it be possible to infer that South America, in terms of the polarity

variable, is the first case of a Unipolar centered RSC, with the pole being a regional power?

In fact, it was found that the logic that defined, in its origin, the RSC of South America as being of the standard type no longer subsists due to the vertiginous decline of the protagonism of Buenos Aires, especially in terms of military resources and, therefore, without an actor capable of consistently filling this vacuum. Nevertheless, in a context of strongly asymmetric power and in which there is no perspective of the use of force, as is the case of the subcontinent, the literature suggests considering material elements as an indication of potentialities given the difficulties of an accurate measurement of their real conditions as a resource of effective power (BIDDLE, 2004).

This means that, in aggregate indices, Brazil presents itself as the holder of the highest military capabilities, which does not presuppose, however, that such indicators automatically translate into superiority in the eventual formation of possible coalitions between countries with non-negligible potential (polarization). Above all, when we consider measures such as the strength of the armed forces and operational means, either in absolute terms or as a proportion of GDP and population.

In short, if the figures referring to defense spending denote Brazilian primacy, when we look at the military resources available for immediate use, separately, they are elusive as to the status of uncontested regional unipolo and, concomitantly, underline being

Brazil, perhaps, a fragile center. In this direction, it is worth noting that, in addition to the objective facts, the role to be played by Brazil as a postulant to the post of *primus inter pares* it will also depend on how the country perceives the RSC: opportunity for building structurally resilient stability or source of negative externalities?

Thus, resorting, again, to the contributions of Wohlforth (2009), such a conjunction of factors points out that although the country concentrates, disproportionately, the resources of the system of which it is part, the observed conditions, seen in its broadest spectrum, are insufficient to provide Brazil with the means that allows it to exercise absolute hegemony and/or control over the RSC of South America. This inference is in line with the perspective presented by Buzan and Wæver (2003, p.58) that a centered RSC is defined not only by the degree of power asymmetry or, in other words, by how dominant the alleged Center is, but also by the form of established hegemony.

This assertion in line with the conjunction of factors presented, in turn, subsidizes us to contemplate, in the subcontinent, two reading possibilities regarding its polar taxonomy. The first points out elements that from an ascending Brazilian unipolarity suggest the incipient contours of a RSC of the centered type. However, the inferences also indicate that such dynamics should be weighed in the shadow of a competing perspective as an alternative reading for power relations in the region and that, in our view, it is the one most likely to materialize. It suggests the possibility that an unbalanced multipolarity will occur, which, as explained by Mearsheimer (2001), results from a system dominated by three or more poles, of which one is the potential hegemon. In this way, we would have with this study elements that refute - in the scope of the temporal cut - the hypothesis proposed from the contributions of Fuccille and Rezende (2013, p. 94) that the South American RSC would have transposed, *in fact*, as for the polarity variable, the epistemological category from a standard model to a centered one.

# O COMPLEXO REGIONAL DE SEGURANÇA DA AMÉRICA DO SUL: POSSIBILIDADES DE RELEITURA TEÓRICA A PARTIR DA VARIÁVEL POLARIDADE (2006-2020)

## RESUMO

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Complexos Regionais de Segurança (CRS) são construções sociais derivadas de relações de interdependência estabelecidas a partir de interações entre variáveis materiais e ideacionais.

Contudo, tal qual outras leituras de natureza conjuntural, a Teoria dos Complexos Regionais de Segurança (TCRS) demanda esforço contínuo de atualização. Dito isso, passadas quase duas décadas desde a apresentação de sua versão mais desenvolvida (2003) e, considerando, neste período, dinâmicas multissetoriais que atuaram na conformação da agenda regional de segurança, seria um contexto de geometria variável de poder capaz de impactar a natureza estrutural do CRS da América do Sul? Para tanto, entre 2006 e 2020, avaliamos elementos que permitiram testar a hipótese de que a América do Sul seria o primeiro caso empírico de uma nova categoria de CRS, utilizando como metodologia o estudo de caso comparativo diacrônico. Concluímos que esse CRS não teria transposto, até o momento, quanto à polaridade, sua epistemologia original.

Palavras-chave: Complexos Regionais de Segurança; América do Sul; Polaridade; Brasil; Capacidades em Defesa



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