

# ARMAMENT MODERNIZATION IN SOUTH AMERICA: EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL PRESSURES ON THE DUALISTIC VIEWS OF REGIONAL SECURITY

Rafael Duarte Villa<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Almost all theoretical production that has somehow dealt with the South American security system is unanimous in observing two aspects: first, the scarce existence of military conflicts between its states – the last substantive war in South America was the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay). Redemocratization, which begun in the 1980s, is seen as the key variable to explain the transformation of the region's relations into something close to a security community (Hurrell 1998) or of a “long peace” (Kacowicz 2005). The second aspect is the emergence of two different security subsystems. On the one hand, that of the Andean countries, with issues related to drug trafficking, the existence of non-state armed groups and of intra-state armed conflicts, and in Colombia and Peru's case unresolved territorial disputes and the existence of States with traditional military behavior. On the other hand, the subsystem in the Southern Cone, which often is identified in the literature as a security community<sup>2</sup>.

This differentiation of security subsystems has contributed much to fueling the argument of a dual outlook of South America, in which even perspectives influenced by critical theory, such as Ruth Diamint's, have noted by highlighting the relationships between the military, civilians and security in

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of São Paulo (USP). Doctor in Political Science by USP, holds a postdoctoral degree in Political Science from Columbia University. E-mail: rafaelvi@usp.br

<sup>2</sup> Karl Deutsch defined the security community (pluralist) as “a transnational region in which two societies have expectations that conflicts between states will not be settled through the use of force” because those states form a security community (Deutsch 1957).

South America “[...] civil-military relations are reconverted at two different speeds: in the Southern Cone, despite the various difficulties, there is a hegemonic recovery, while in the Andean countries there is a deep crisis of state institutions”. (Diamint, 2001, p. 24).

This article stresses these theses in order to show: first, that contemporary developments and concerns about the purchase of sophisticated weaponry by South American countries, especially Chile, Venezuela and Brazil, in the first two decades of this century are a critical point for the idea of a permanent (democratic) peace zone in the region. Critical moments in South America are not wars, because of their absence, but the times when an arms build-up is operated. Second, the arms build-up questions the rigidity of the dual vision with two safety subsystems. In fact, arms purchases transform the region into a single regional security complex, since it is operated not only in the Andean system and in the Southern Cone, but by countries from both subregions.

Methodologically, aggregate military investments of the countries of the region at the beginning of the millennium are taken as an empirical basis to try to demonstrate the tensions of theses based both on security community perspectives and on dualistic analysis, and to show the new political goals of countries such as Brazil, Chile and Venezuela – taking into account medium-term trends that began to consolidate in the period 2003-2007, when the South American region underwent a vigorous economic expansion. The article is divided into four parts: the first presents what I call dualistic theses; in the second part, the empirical developments of the South American arms build-up are discussed, especially the cases of armament purchases in Brazil, Chile and Venezuela between 2003 and 2007, when the main weaponry purchase contracts were signed. The third one, in the light of the empirical data and theoretical discussions questions the dual theses. In the final remarks one takes stock of the tensions in the dual theses on the South American arms build-up.

## The Dualist Theses on Regional Security Systems in South America

Several theories of International Relations, be they of realist, institutionalist or constructivist inspiration, agree that Latin America has a historical process of limited, or close to zero, military conflict. The classical realist perspective of security dilemmas had been absent from regional inter-state relations. This absence has been favored by the long periods when wars be-

tween states disappear from the region's military history and, above all, by the strong conviction of the political class that their neighbors are not threats to the existence of their states or that they do not modernize their military capabilities with offensive goals in mind. As Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas have pointed out, "Civilians do not believe that their neighbors are threats because history has shown that their neighbors rarely attack, so they pay little attention to defense policy and avoid strongly funding militaries". (Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas 2007, 70). Added to this is the fact that although there are territorial disputes<sup>3</sup>, these do not seem sufficiently intense in South America to originate an inter-state security dynamic that would generate perceptions of threats as, for example the emergence of an expansionist State. There are no similarities between South American and European historic experiences regarding the emergence of expansionist states.

A variety of bibliographical production has advanced security analysis on South America based on the dichotomy of the Andean region (traditional security complex based on power policies) versus the Southern Cone (security community). Aligned with these analysis, Hirst (2006), commenting on the fragmentation of the security agenda in Latin America, has underlined the same dual vision of the South American complex when drawing attention to the fact that there are in South America an "[...] Andean sub-region weakened by the fragility of its state institutions and with few means to contain the push of drug trafficking and armed groups; and a pacific area in the Southern Cone committed to regional integration and mutual subregional confidence, particularly in the cases of Argentina and Brazil". (Hirst 2006, 6). Bonilla and Cepik (2004, 86) have pointed out that in the "Subregional space, military and political issues are subject to very high securitization due to the character of the Colombian conflict and its evident regionalization [...]".

Going even further than the realist perspectives, institutionalist – English School production, like that of Kakowicz (1998), has developed a thesis of the emergence, in South America as a whole, of a peace zone in which the South Cone's cooperation has approached something similar to a pluralistic community of security, or zone of peace, in which its member states no longer have expectations of resolving their conflicts through war. In the same direction, David Pion-Berlin (2000) has argued that the integration process of Mercosur has contributed to generate expectations of peaceful resolution of intra-state conflicts between members. A more nuanced view of this thesis has been developed by Hirst (1998) who, working from concepts of democratic peace and pluralistic security communities, has pointed to the conclusion

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<sup>3</sup> At least until 2017, five unresolved territorial disputes remained in South America (Bolivia-Chile, Colombia-Venezuela, Guyana-Venezuela, Uruguay-Brazil, Colombia-Paraguay).

that, “Democratization is an important but insufficient condition to intensify cooperation in the Southern Cone [...] In fact, security cooperation and democratization have not led to security integration, they have been effective in diminishing previous mistrust and animosity among Southern Cone societies and States – especially between Argentina and Brazil”. (Hirst, 1998).

Within this same liberal perspective, the scarce inter-state conflicts in Latin America have also made the region a case for studies surrounding the theory of democratic peace. Dominguez’s work has reinforced the strong links between the strength of democratic institutions in the Southern Cone and the peace and security process that the subregion lives as a product of “democratic peace” (Dominguez 1998). Dominguez himself, working with Shifter in introducing the discussion on “post-consolidation” and “de-consolidation” points to the high fragilities and vulnerabilities of Andean democracies (Dominguez and Shifter 2003).

In the empirical arena this type of argument has been reinforced by the emergence in the inter-American system of an institutional regime of democratic clauses, and even in some integration institutions such as Mercosur. Also, Dominguez’s (2007) liberal perspective has supported this same argument by emphasizing how firmly entrenched in Latin America’s international law is the legal principle of *iuris possidetis iuris*, whereby countries in the region concede that their limits and of its neighbors correspond, to a greater or lesser extent, to those of the era of political emancipation in the first decades of the 19th century.

Constructivist arguments in research such as that of Andrew Hurrell (1998) and Villa (2007) have also supported the idea of a low propensity for conflict in the post-Cold War Southern Cone countries, pointing to the emergence, in both works, of a loose security community<sup>4</sup>, especially between Argentina and Brazil in the South American sub-region. For Hurrell, a fundamental aspect to be considered in the construction of this security community was the process of democratization in both countries. The process of redemocratization could have provided Argentina and Brazil with a common vision of interests and identities and, above all, made them understand the vulnerability and fragility of the redemocratization process and the impor-

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4 In the definition of Karl Deustch (1957), or authors such as Adler & Barnett (1998), a security community is a transnational geographic space, contiguous or not, between states and whose societies have expectations that conflicts between them will be solved by peaceful means. The key point of a security community are the values that the “community” shares, be they in a political, economic or cultural sense. Authors like Hurrell (1998) believe that in the Southern Cone a security community based on the re-democratization that has operated since the 1980s is emerging. And Deustch (1957) himself believes that there is a North Atlantic security community based on liberal values and culture.

tance of their joint defense. Thus, bilateral cooperation has come to play a role as a common shield against domestic threats to the process of redemocratization. Although these threats were greater in Argentina – where the military movement of Painted Faces attempted to break democratic institutionalization in the late 1980s –, the Brazilian government realized that the maturing of democracy in the country depended heavily on the consolidation of democracy in neighboring Argentina. “Believing in redemocratization was important in redefining interests, identities, and a common sense of purpose” (Hurrel 1998). In the same direction, but addressing the variable “impact of democracy” on Brazilian foreign policy in relation to Argentina, Hurrel credits the institutionalization of a system of norms on disarmament and confidence building between Argentina and Brazil to the dismantling of geopolitical phantoms and the beginning of a cycle of military cooperation in the years of democratization. As a result, a successful set of self-governing norms and monitoring of the reciprocal mechanisms of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between both countries was created, which allowed for the stability and continuity of cooperative ventures. The institutionalization of military cooperation agreements has included permanent exchanges between the staffs of the larger military states of the two countries and the continuation of bilateral working groups on nuclear matters. The rules of mutual trust between the two countries also include the institutionalization of channels of communication between the presidents, senior officials (following the European path of the second post-Cold War period), consultations on participation in peace missions and the establishment of the triple frontier (Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay) to deal with drug trafficking, smuggling and terrorism (Villa 2007). In the Brazil-Argentina case, actions have also included the joint development of the “Gaúcho” light combat vehicle for the Brazilian and Argentinean Armed Forces, which is in its final phase of operational evaluation by both countries, before the start of series production (Military Power Review 2008).

An intermediate thesis is presented by Buzan & Waever (2003). These authors have supported the idea that in South America there are two well-differentiated subsystems of security: the Andean countries, with emphasis on the military aspect and territorial conflicts; and the Southern Cone, where there is a security community. Some situations of different preferences among the South American countries sometimes seem to come in support of the theoretical dichotomy of Buzan and Waever. At the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Conference on Security in 2003, “when the solution adopted – the notion of multidimensional security<sup>5</sup> – [South America] could

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5 One should remember that the OAS institutionalized the concept of multidimensional security that year. By this concept the organization assumes that the sources of threat to the

barely conceal the conceptual distance between, for example, the emphasis of Brazil and Argentina on poverty as a security threat and the much more traditional concerns of Ecuador and Venezuela with state military threats” (Cepik 2005). This same thesis is supported by Monica Hirst (2003) to whom the two major developments in security and defense at the beginning of the new millennium in South America were the diversification of security options and priorities and the differentiated patterns of military evolution in the South Cone and the Andean region.

In this way, International Relations theory has pointed in two directions: either South America as a peace zone, or a partial security community, or South America as a mixed region in which coexists a subregion more tied to traditional principles and another that sees the emergence of a weak security community. Both views emphasize South American dislike for the violent resolution of conflicts and the attachment of the region to the principles of international law.

But what happens when some of the states in South America began to carry out an armament build-up unusual to its security system in the first two decades of this century? In order to face this question, which will stress the thesis of duality in security and defense systems in South America, the armaments build-up is next presented.

## **The Armaments Build-up in South America at the Beginning of the Millennium**

Although it is not a theoretical argument, but an empirical one, the low military investment of South America has been used either to present the little concern of the political class with the re-armament and modernization of the South and Latin American armed forces; or as an argument to illustrate that South America is an atypical region, or exceptional in that military capabilities or geographic proximity are not perceived with such concern among neighboring countries. Among the regions of the so-called periphery of the international system, the annual South American spending percentage is only superior to Central America (which has the lowest world spending) and Africa. It is important to realize, however, that South American spending is relatively low compared to other regions of the periphery of the international system, such as Asia and the Middle East. However, regional military spend-

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states, governments and societies are plural: they can be military, but they can also come from hunger, poverty, natural disasters, climate change, terrorism, drug trafficking, international crime, corruption in national states, ethnic rivalries, and so on.

ings fell between 2014 and 2016, and are

[...] 13 per cent lower compared to 2008, South American military spending grew by 4.1 per cent to \$ 57.0 billion [between 2016-2017], the first annual rise since 2014, (by 15 per cent to \$ 5.7 billion) and Brazil (by 6.3 per cent to \$ 29.3 billion). The rise in military expenditure in South America between 2016 and 2017 is mainly attributed to the increase by Argentina (by 15 per cent to \$ 5.7 billion) and Brazil (by 6.3 per cent to \$ 29.3 billion). The increase in Brazil's military expenditure, the first annual increase since 2014 and the largest since 2010, comes as a surprise given the country's current economic and political turmoil. However, in 2017 the Brazilian Government loosened its budget deficit targets to 2020 and released additional funds (\$ 4.1 billion) for all major sectors, including the military. Venezuela, amid a year of social and political unrest, increased its military spending in 2017 by 19 per cent compared with 2016, since 2013. However, the ongoing economic crisis in the country meant that for all major sectors, including the military, military spending in 2017 was still 75 per cent lower than in 2008. (Nam 2018, 4-5).

Latin American countries with the largest real increases in military spending in the period 2003-2007 all belong to South American: Venezuela (with 78.53%), Chile (53%) and Ecuador (49%). Also, in the region were the three countries with the highest military budgets: Brazil (accounting for 46% of expenditures, Colombia (accounting for 15%) and Chile (13%) (Stalenheim et al 2008, 200). Of the US\$ 44 billion that Latin America invested in military spending in 2007, only South American countries were responsible for US\$ 39.6 billion.

Since 2005, Chile and Venezuela – and to a lesser extent, Brazil – have been the two countries that have increased the imports of arms in South America, raising the delicate question of whether the excessive concern to modernize the armed forces by these countries could be fueling an arms race in the region. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released in mid-2008 the balance of the previous year, with regard to the exports, imports and transfer of arms around the world. In the medium-term analysis, SIPRI found a percentage increase in arms transfers to South America: “South American states accounted for 5% of the volume of international transfers of conventional arms imported for the period 2003-2007 – that is, 47% higher than in 1998-2002” (Holtom et al 2006).

The increase coincides with the fact that between 2004 and 2006 South America had three consecutive years of strong economic growth (grow-



ing at an average rate of approximately 5.3%) (ECLAC 2006) something that was not recorded since the 1970s when growth was close to average rates of 7.0%. Although growth in South America dropped to 4.9% in 2007, some of its strongest economies, such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Venezuela, respectively, maintained growth dynamics at rates of 8.7%, 5.3%, 5.1% and 8.4%,<sup>6</sup> respectively. On the other hand, economic growth was accompanied by improvements in the main macroeconomic indicators in almost all the countries of the region (inflation, fiscal adjustment and reduction of public debt – and even some sources have interpreted the increase in South American military spendings in the last five years as a result of economic growth; a weak dollar, that stimulates different types of imports; and the political will to modernize the Armed Forces of the region, which are largely confronted with the obsolescence of armaments inventories (IISS, 2008, 59).

Could such acquisitions be transforming South America into an emerging market for sales of sophisticated conventional weapons? For example, in the case of Chile, in short-term analysis the country appears as the main South American arms importer of Great Britain, occupying in 2007 the second place in its global exports of armaments to the world, tied with Romania – for both countries the United Kingdom exported 9%, only lower than the 17% it exported to the United States market. The dynamism of imports of Chilean armaments was reflected in the fact that the military budget grew by 23% in 2007 (Ibid 60-61). Venezuela was, in 2007, the third largest market for arms exports from Russia to the world (with 5% of total Russian exports, although this percentage is well below the 45% Russia exports to China and the 22% exported to the Indian market (Ibid). “Not surprisingly, arms exporting countries – Russia in particular – have pointed out that with economic success and the aging of Latin America, its markets offer relevant opportunities for the sales of new military equipment” (ibid. 59).

In the Andean security sub-complex, the case that has attracted the most attention, however, is that of Venezuela. Although some sources acknowledge that until 2006 Venezuela was not the main investor in arms in the region (Latin America Security & Strategic Review 2006, 1-2), the fact is that “Venezuela has dramatically increased its arms imports from position 56 in the period 1998-2002 to the 24th position in the period 2003-2007 as the largest regional importer”. (SIPRI 2007). Only in 2007 did Venezuela

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6 Estado de São Paulo Online, “PIB da Argentina cresceu 8,7% em 2007, diz Cristina Kirchner”, 12 feb. 2008, available at <[http://www.estadao.com.br/economia/not\\_eco122970,o.htm](http://www.estadao.com.br/economia/not_eco122970,o.htm)>, consulted in 27/08/2008; Dinheirama, “Alta do PIB, a Selic e o crescimento do Brasil”, available at <<http://dinheirama.com/blog/2008/03/14/alta-do-pib-a-selic-e-o-crescimento-do-brasil/>>, accessed 27/08/2017.



increase its defense budget by 78% (reaching US\$ 887 million), becoming the largest spender in real terms in South America that year (Holtom et al., 2008). Although the amount of arms imports is lower than that of Chile for the period 2003-2007 (US\$ 1.417 billion from Venezuela versus US\$ 2.283 billion from Chile), oil prices are steadily rising for several years, the presidential will to improve military capabilities of the country and the search for improvement in the Venezuelan regional political position have led the country to increasing its military budget. It should be noted that Venezuela has been consolidating, over the years, a tendency that shows Russia as the main supplier of armaments. Thus in the period 2003-2007 Russia supplied 93% of the arms purchased by Venezuela, while China supplied 3% and Israel 2% (Ibid 306). This may explain why, in 2006 and 2007, Venezuela ranked 8th and 4th among the developing countries that received the most arms deliveries and that signed arms transfer agreements the most (IISS 2008, 449). Venezuelan governments also have legal mechanisms to allow additional funds to be added to the military budget in the fiscal year. The main mechanism is the so-called *Lei Paraguas* (Umbrella Law), which allows the government to negotiate external loans to finance extra military spending, not always included in the original military budget, although the Venezuelan government has announced its intention to use this less frequently and even eliminate such mechanism (Ibid 2008).

In the Southern Cone subsystem, Chile is the country that stands out in its efforts to acquire modern technology weapons to (re)capitalize on its armed forces. In the period 2003-2007, Chile became the largest importer of conventional weapons in South America. The country ranked 36th in the world ranking of recipients of armaments in the period between 1998 and 2002, and in the period 2003-2007 it became the 12th position (the first position among Latin American countries) (Holtom et al., 2008, 305 ). Chile has also been the only Latin American country capable of maintaining a military expenditure/Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio above 3.5% throughout this first decade of the 21st century, with the exception of 2007, when it was exceeded in real expenditures by Venezuela, by approximately US\$ 2, 109 billion.

This constant level of spending was possible due to two factors: first, because Chile has performed very well in recent years. For example, between 2004 and 2007 the Chilean GDP grew at an annual average rate of 6.2%. Second, the Chilean armed forces continue to benefit from the permanence of the Copper Law that dates back to the 1950s<sup>7</sup> and was modified in the days of

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7 In fact, the Copper Law (*Ley del Cobre*) dates from 1958, but it was modified in 1998, still during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

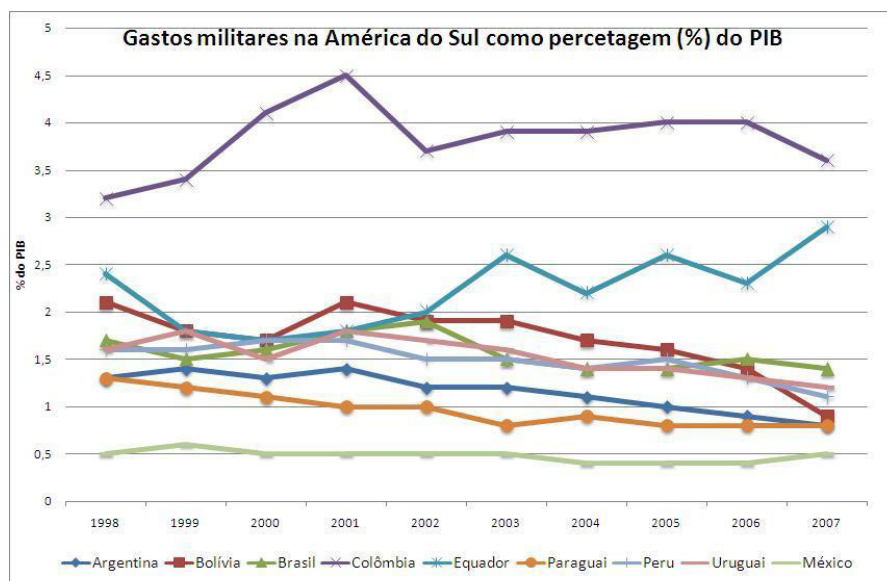
the military government of Augusto Pinochet, whereby 10% of copper exports were directed to finance operational military expenditures and equipment purchases<sup>8</sup>. The fact is that Chile is the main world exporter of copper and the international prices of this commodity have had a very high increase in recent years<sup>9</sup>. For many years the Copper Law contributed an annual average of US\$ 200 million per year to the military budget but, due to the unprecedented increase in international prices, the Law would be responsible for financing alone almost US\$ 1 billion, which led to strong pressures from Chile's political and social sectors to revise or extinguish the law.

Brazil represents a transversal State, or bridge, between the two South American security subsystems. Although in the medium term Brazil had not shown the same level of spending, in comparative terms of GDP, as Venezuela and Chile, any inclination in terms of military expenditures must include Brazil, due to the greater complexity of its economy, the fact that it represents half of the region's GDP (around 56%), and the greater complexity of its regional and global policies. It is true that between 2003 and 2007 Brazil reduced its international weight as an importer of conventional armaments – from position 32 in the period 1998-2002 it fell to position 33 – this decrease was offset by the important increase of the military budget in 2007 by more than 33%, which was by far the most important change in a decade. This explains why Brazil ranked 14th among the countries with the highest military spending until 2006, moving to the 12th place in 2007 (Stepanova 2008, 12).

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8 According to The Economist, the money allocated for the "Ley del Cobre" concept has already brought to Chile 340 tanks from Germany, eight frigates, two new submarines and 28 F-16 fighter jets. See The economist, "South America defense: speak fraternally but carry a stick", 05/29/2008.

9 Chile is the world's largest copper producer – with 25% of the world's production – and by 2005 the mining industry will contribute US\$ 6.1 billion to the country, or about 25% of total tax revenues expected by 2005, a number that may be higher today because international copper prices, which averaged US\$ 1.7 a pound that year, doubled as of 2006, and continued to grow in 2007. In addition, international copper price growth had a significant impact on the economies of other South American producers, mainly Peru, and to a lesser extent Argentina and Brazil. For this information consult: : UniversiaKnowledge@Warten, "Preços do cobre aliviam cofres da América latina", 21/09/2005, <<http://wharton.universia.net/index.cfm?fa=viewArticle&id=1028&language=portuguese&specialId=>>, consulted in 05/09/2008 ; *Último Segundo*, "Com preço maior, roubo de cobre no Brasil cresce 11% 2em 2007", 06/05/2008, <[http://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/brasil/2008/05/06/com\\_preco\\_maior\\_roubo\\_de\\_cobre\\_no\\_brasil\\_cresce\\_11\\_em\\_2007\\_1300233.html](http://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/brasil/2008/05/06/com_preco_maior_roubo_de_cobre_no_brasil_cresce_11_em_2007_1300233.html)>, accessed 05/09/2008.



Fonte: Elaborado com base em dados do SIPRI e IISS

However, we must pay attention to the fact that Brazilian military expenditures of almost US\$ 70 billion in the period 2003-2007 is diluted in the size of its economy, whose GDP reached close to R\$ 2,5 trillion (or US\$ 1.5 trillion) in 2007 (IBGE 2008). As a result, in the military expenditure/GDP ratio, Brazil is a country that spends little when compared to Colombia or Chile, and only slightly more than Argentina and Peru (see graph above). In the period 2003-2007, Brazil spent an average of 1.5% of its GDP on military expenditures. However, it should be borne in mind that, although the defense budget increased by an average of 15% between 2004 and 2007 – and despite the 33% of 2007 – only 4% of the budget is available for investment in new acquisitions and weaponry upgrade. The remainder of the military budget sheet is spent primarily on staff pay, including military retirement and pension expenses. In this way, the actual expenditure of US\$ 818 million in purchases and upgrades of arms in the period 2003-2007 was lower than those of Chile and Venezuela.

Between 2003 and 2007 Brazil imported most of its armament from the European Union (64%), followed by the United States (17%) and Canada (7%) (Holtom et al 2008), and the imports of these and other countries is mainly possible through the purchase plans of the Navy and the Aeronautics. Some analysis have suggested that Brazil, like Chile, has given preference to Western suppliers, especially those belonging to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and not to Russia or China, not by chance, but by a ra-

tionality that involves a “strategic choice”: in its emergence, the South American regional power does not predict a relationship of rivalry with the West (Stratfor 2008), but rather a partnership for its plans to develop an important role in regional security. This spending evolution is expected to be completed by the signing, in 2013, of the super modern Swedish fighter Griphen, thus concretely starting the largest modernization program of the Brazilian armed forces.

## Empirical and Conceptual Tensions Putting Pressure in the Dualistic Perspectives

How have the analysis reacted to this increase in the South American arms build-up? The truth is that analysis that are more realistic, whether they are academically elaborated or of a conjunctural nature, have strongly recovered, at least until 2011, the idea of the vitality, and even a certain dynamism of perceptions of threats between neighboring states, especially Chile and Venezuela. Thus, in recent years, it has been heard with some frequency that Latin America, and especially South America, would be entering an arms race. Frequent media reports and strong statements by political figures have fueled these fears<sup>10</sup>. Also, some academic production has come to the same conclusion, as Malamud and Garcia argue: “The famous arms race in Latin America, led by Venezuela, is no longer just a speech” (Malamud and Garcia 2006). However, this argument does not seem very consistent: “[...] It is doubtful that events in the region can be described exactly as an ‘arms race’ in classical terms. Acquisitions have been primarily motivated by efforts to replace or upgrade military capabilities in order to maintain existing capabilities; respond to major threats to domestic security; strengthen links with supplier governments; boost the domestic military industry; participate in peace missions; or improve the international or regional profile of the country”. (Holtom et al., 2008, 305).

One result of this type of analysis is that there is, in principle, a recovery of the state as a strong security actor; secondly, analysis based on the conceptual assumptions of security communities and democratic peace, and even those that, as Buzan and Weaver (2003), visualize a mixed regional security system – a traditional half in the Andean countries and a security com-

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<sup>10</sup> By the end of 2006, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, in reaction to arms purchases by countries such as Venezuela and Chile said the region was entering an “arms race”. See for journalistic references: Downie, Andrew, *Time World*, “A South American Arms Race?”, Friday, december 21, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1697776,00.html>; accessed 23/07/2017.

munity in the Southern Cone.

However, the realistic dramatization of the arms race in South America from the beginning of this century was important because it identified and recognized certain difficulties, images and mistrust among South American States arising from the upgrade and recapitalization cycle of the military park. Above all, as a conceptual result, it questions the dualistic assumption of the Andean subsystem (traditional security relations) versus the Southern Cone (security community).

Constructivist and liberal studies have tensioned this dual perspective given the political conditions in which the build-up occurs: in the first decade of this century there was a group of countries that intended to improve their position and regional and global political profile, regardless of their regional sub-complex – Andean region or the Southern Cone – especially Brazil and Venezuela, and, to a lesser extent, Chile. In this sense, two options appear: to modernize their military capabilities and to strengthen strategic partnerships with governments seen as global suppliers of advanced military equipment.

In this sense, there is a political condition that feeds the arms build-up of the South American security system which has little to do with strictly traditional concerns, understood as military ones. The South American regional security system has been going through a new phase in which broader political and military objectives shift traditional concerns. These new objectives are related to the improvement of the regional and even global political position of some South American countries especially Brazil, Chile and Venezuela. Certainly, there are domestic motivations that also encourage the build-up in the case of these three countries. However, both the domestic security goals arising from the build-up and the regional policy goals, by their latent nature are not explicit, they generate fears in several neighboring countries. Being in the presence of the classical problem of information asymmetry, poor communication, and even the low institutionalization of trust measures between actors, creates conditions for the resurgence of distrust, which fuels false representations of facts or misrepresentation of neighbors in relation to the countries leading the build-up. And given that the three State actors that are the source of these false representations are located throughout the South American region, we question the dualistic theoretical fragmentation that sees a more traditional subsystem of security in the Andean countries and a security community in the Southern Cone.

In this logic of regional and global ambitions in the Chilean military build-up, regional goals and motivations are present. One motivation of the Chilean governments, as well as the high military command, is the transformation of Chile into a regional military power capable of achieving, by the

end of this decade, what is technically known as “NATO military standard” (Gonzales 2005), status not reached by any South American country until our days. During the period 2003-2007 Chile’s main import markets for arms were the European Union with 82%, the United States with 15% and Israel with 3% (Ibid). This choice of Western, or with strong ties to the West, countries as suppliers could be related to the fact that, as some analysis suggest, Chile has ambitions to acquire that military status (Ibid).

However, Chile’s participation in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions has also been highlighted as one of the main reasons for the modernization of the Armed Forces and the investment in the purchase of military equipment. Chile, which until 1990 had participated in only three UN peacekeeping missions, has increased its participation to 15, and is the only South American country since 1996 to have a “State [Chilean] policy for participation in peace operations” (Ramirez 2007).

Also, in Venezuela’s case strategic motivations have been present in arms purchases: the improvement of the country’s regional political position. The Venezuelan government believes in the possibility of Venezuela’s leadership in South America. One way to improve the political position towards this goal is to improve military capabilities and the regional influence that comes from that. Improving military capabilities in order to improve its regional political position vis-à-vis competitors with the Brazilian dimension has also been linked to the strengthening ties with Russia. Some analysts believe that if the alliance between Venezuela and Russia bothers the United States, the modernization of the Venezuelan arsenal also displeases Brazil, not so much for the military threat itself, but for the political improvement of the Venezuelan position in the much-speculated dispute for the South American leadership between both countries<sup>11</sup>. Thus, it is argued that Brazil, as well as Chile, would be preparing a strategy to reduce the influence that Venezuela has acquired in relation to some South American countries (Latin America Security & Strategic Review, 2007). Chile would be indifferent to the fact that the Venezuelan government would be trying to transform Venezuela into a regional power since the country would at present have the capacity to reach this condition considering the high foreign exchange derived from the oil sales<sup>12</sup>.

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11 “Hugo Chavez achète de nouvelles armes en Russie”, *Le Figaro*, 24/7/2008, <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2008/07/24/01003-20080724ARTFIG00004-hugo-chavez-achete-de-nouvelles-armesen-russie-.php>>, consulted in 13/8/2009; see also, BBC-Brasil, “Compra de armas da Venezuela causa ‘inveja’ ao Brasil”, 24/7/2008, <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/portuguese/reporterbbc/story/2008/07/080724\\_pressvenezuela\\_pu.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/portuguese/reporterbbc/story/2008/07/080724_pressvenezuela_pu.shtml)>, accessed 13/01/2018.

12 “Chávez busca ‘armas e liderança’ em Moscou”, *BBC-Brasil*, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

In Brazil, on the other hand, the modernization plans of the Brazilian Armed Forces raise certain warnings in some sectors of neighboring countries regarding the possibility of Brazil following the same route of Chile and Venezuela (Gosman 2007). Like most South American countries, one reason strongly given for the purchase of new armaments is the technological lag of the Armed Forces, especially the Air Force. To bring the Armed Forces up to date, especially the Aeronautics, super-modern French Rafale fighter planes would need to be bought.

But in fact, the project of modernizing Brazilian Armed Forces overcomes possible concerns with the modernization of those of any neighboring country. The great Brazilian motivation is more strongly related to its projection as a hemispheric and global Brazil, that is, the adequacy of Brazil to its emergent global political player position (emergent global political actor). Analysis have drawn attention to the fact that although Venezuelan purchases have received more attention (mainly by the “Chavez factor”), Brazil is the only South American country with the capacity to make a long-term investment. “Brazil is better positioned to start a constant arms build-up supported by its own domestic industry [...]. The choice of the three [airline companies], significantly two from NATO countries [and one that could become a member] suggests a point of crucial importance on the way Brazil views its future. Despite the changing geopolitical realities in the world, Brazil in its emergence to a regional prominence in the next decade does not seem to foresee greater conflicts or even a relationship of rivalry with the West” (Stratfor 2008).

Perhaps in this context of regional and global motivations can be understood the elaboration of the Strategic Plan of National Defense. In September 2007 President Lula, avoiding referring to any motivation that had to do with Venezuela, or any other South American country, announced the creation of a working group, under the direction of the Ministry of Defense and coordinated by the intellectual Mangabeira Unger, to formulate the guidelines of a plan for the modernization of the Armed Forces (National Defense Strategic Plan, or Growth Acceleration Plan in Defense – PAC in Defense, as it has also been called, that takes into account three general and five concrete objectives. The first refers to: 1) the review of defense strategies; 2) reactivation of the domestic arms industry; 3) autonomy of defense policy. The concrete concerns are addressed to answer the following questions: 1) which are the best strategies for times of peace and war; 2) organization of the Armed Forces, endowed with the technological and operational vanguard; 3) reactivation of the national armaments industry, directed to the goal of autonomy in defense;

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[portuguese/reporterbbc/story/2008/07/080722\\_chavezmoscou\\_mp.shtml](http://portuguese/reporterbbc/story/2008/07/080722_chavezmoscou_mp.shtml),  
13/04/2018.

accessed



4) identification of the Armed Forces with the nation, especially regarding borders defense, where the Amazon appears as a priority, compulsory military service and social tasks; 5) establishment of lines for the Armed Forces in situations of order and rule of law<sup>13</sup>.

The armament build-up in South America, however, also tensioned middle-ground analysis, such as that based on the regional security complexes of Buzan and Waever (2003). The South American arms build-up reveals tensions between a movement that pulls toward traditional (neo)security assets, seeking broader political goals through military means – in cases such as Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela –, as we explored in the previous section, and another that seeks to generate a certain social capital through the design of CBMs. However, both movements are not geographically limited, as the analysis of regional security complexes implies. That is, it is not only the Andean region that behaves in a neo-traditional way, nor is it just in the Southern Cone where the CBMs are present. What we have here called neo-traditional behaviors are present in Andean countries, such as Venezuela, and are also welcomed in Southern Cone countries, such as Brazil and Chile. The same can be said of the CBMs, they are contiguous, in the sense that they cross both geographical spaces. Although it should be recognized that levels of adoption and application of CBMs are unequal, with the Southern Cone having a stronger participation in those than the Andean region (Holtom 2008, 305).

The previous can be illustrated by the reactions generated by arms modernization in sectors of Peru and Bolivia. In a typical problem of misrepresentation, the purchase of modern military equipment by Chile has raised hypotheses in Peruvian and Bolivian political and academic sectors that the modernization of Chilean Armed Forces would have the immediate consequence of opening a wide gap in the quality, sophistication and available technology of the Chilean arsenal in comparison to the first ones. Chilean military spending has also been particularly concerned with Peru and Bolivia, with which Chile still has territorial disputes that date back to the end of the 19th century and are very sensitive to all of them. According to a study by Carlos Gutiérrez, “[...] the evidences that demonstrate Chile’s military spending and the acquisition of modern weapons systems have been a determining factor in the neighbors type of arms race, which would bring back the ghosts of historical conflicts (Gutierrez 2007, 309). However, it is the scarcity of accurate exchange of information that leads to this kind of image (fear). Even the possibility of using the modernization of Chilean stocks for potential settlements in border contentious can eventually create burdens for Chile and

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13 For all these inquiries, see “Lula launches preparations for superpower status”, *Latin America Security & Strategic Review* (2007).

other countries. Arms suppliers may refuse to sell because it is unclear to them whether their sales can generate conditions for future regional conflicts or more structural problems such as regional military imbalance. In 2005, for example, Switzerland canceled the sale to Chile of 93 modern Leopard II tanks (later bought from Germany) and some sources suggest that the reason for this was the Swiss government's distrust regarding the real Chilean motivation for such purchases<sup>14</sup>.

In the case of Chile and Peru, that dispute maritime areas since the late 19th century, as sustained by a work of Farih Kahhat, although the advances in cooperation between the two countries, a certain mistrust persists and is fed in reserved official documents in which are projected (unofficial) hypotheses based on inaccurate information or incoherent arguments (Kahhat 2006).

However, from Chile's side, there has been an effort to improve the quality of information through the construction of security regimes (CBMs) with their Peruvian and Bolivian neighbors given the concerns raised by the increase in arms purchases. Especially after the Chilean acquisition of the F-16 fighter planes (Higuera 2005), at the beginning of this decade, the tensions derived from this fact were alleviated by the beginning of trust-generating agreements. During the governments of Ricardo Lagos in Chile and Alejandro Toledo, in Peru, tensions and suspicions increased sharply, but were attenuated from the beginning of the second government of Peruvian President Allan García. The CBM measures between Chile and Peru have included meetings among defense ministers, trying to reactivate a mechanism called the 2 + 2 Meeting, which is a permanent commission for consultation, policy coordination and information exchange, which includes the ministries of defense and Foreign Affairs of both countries, whose activities had been suspended since the time of Alejandro Toledo (Latin America Security & Strategic Review 2007, 9).

Regarding Chile-Bolivia relations – which have been frozen for several years in this decade and despite tense bilateral declarations at the beginning of the Evo Morales administration – there have been great improvements since 2007 and a series of CBMs were announced by the governments of both countries, including the destruction of landmines that Chile disseminated in the years of Pinochet dictatorship along the border with Bolivia, as well as the sending of Bolivian soldiers to Chile to be trained in: 1) mine activities; 2) exchange of Bolivian students in Chilean military academies; (3) permanent consultation mechanisms and anti-drug cooperation efforts (Ibid, 9).

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14 "Chile teme que conflicto con Perú afecte compra de armas", 22/11/2005, <<http://www.gatoencerrado.net/store/noticias/35/35249/detalle.htm>>, consulted in 22/9/2017.

In both South American geographic spaces, the possibilities of an arms race are attenuated by formal and informal confidence-building measures (CBMs), which have played an important role in reducing the impact of arms procurement in South America (Holtom et al 2008 304-305) or attenuating the deepening of conflicts arising from border disputes that have not yet been resolved. The CBMs aim to create transparency, monitoring mechanisms in military procedures and operations, reduce asymmetries of information among member states of a regime of rules in the treatment of security and disarmament problems<sup>15</sup>. If armament purchases suggest a movement towards (neo)traditional patterns in the South American system – since they stimulate eventual and historical “enmity” – this movement is problematized, or somewhat attenuated, by patterns of “friendship” based on the search for CBMs, which generate conditions for the stretching of the weak security community, in the sense described by some theorists (Adler and Barnett 1998) of the security community, specifically in the countries of the Southern Cone such as Argentina and Brazil (Oelsner 2009).

## Final Remarks

Returning to the theoretical argument, the analysis that we had been defined as dual, argue that South America has two different security sub-systems: one of the Andean countries (with emphasis on the military aspect and in territorial conflicts), and another in the Southern Cone, where there is the emergence of a security community. Analysis such as those made by Hirst (2006) have argued that the two major developments in security and defense at the beginning of the new millennium in South America were the diversification of security options and priorities and differentiated patterns of military evolution in the Southern Cone and the Andean region. On the other hand, analysis based on concepts of security community and democratic peace have emphasized the development, in the Southern Cone, of communities of values and the impact of the democratic nature of their political systems in the consolidation of cooperative relations. However, South American military expenditures for the 2003-2007 five-year period show that there are no two complexes in the strict sense. Regional and global goals of countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela, which are goals of a political rather than military nature, however, suffer from the problem of misrepresentation, since

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<sup>15</sup> Regarding CBMs in Latin America see the excellent work of Bromley, M. & Perdomo (2005), C. “CBMs in Latin America and the effect of the arms acquisition by Venezuela”, Working Paper 41/2005. Available at <<http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documentos/216.asp>>, accessed in 05/09/2008.

it is not clear to some of their neighboring states what are the motivations behind their build-up. Thus, what for Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela could appear as political goals are interpreted as traditional goals by neighbors, or even among them, as in the case of Brazil-Venezuela. That is, reflecting on events, misrepresentation is common to the South American complex as a whole.

While it is correct to say that South America has built a historic zone of peace, if it is understood by that the absence of wars, or few wars since the formation of the modern system of South American states, it is also true that dualistic analysis have provided little attention to the problems stemming from information scarcity in the South American build-up process, which has the consequence of increasing fears about intentions, capacities and actions projected on state actors. Somehow this draws attention to the precariousness of CBMs, the main tool of security regimes in South America, through which it is possible to take “accurate information to calm false rumors” (Lindle, 2007, p. 1), which allow reciprocal knowledge of the actors and their intentions among themselves. CBMs have played an important role in mitigating the impact of the acquisition of arms in South America (Holtom et al., 2008, 304-305) or of mitigating conflicts arising from unresolved border disputes.

More than an arms race, almost all South American countries began a recapitalization of their obsolete military inventory, dating mostly from the 1950s and 1960s, and the most modern ones from the 1980s. At the beginning of the millennium, this re-capitalization means an upgrade and replacement of military equipment (Hodge, 2008). However, there is much asymmetry in re-capitalization. Chile and Venezuela have benefited from two conditions. First, there is a strong tendency in both countries to use their export commodities (oil and copper) to finance military spending and support their plans for modernizing the Armed Forces; second, both countries rely on original extra-budgetary mechanisms (Chile’s Copper Law, Paraguayan Umbrella Law) to finance military spending, such that the original military budget for each fiscal year rarely coincides with real military spending; the end of the economic crises in Latin America between the years 1997 and 2000 also provided financial conditions for the re-emergence of projects to modernize the armed forces (Martin 2006, p.3). In such a way that re-capitalization, in the form of upgrades or new purchases, regardless of actual or latent motivations, can be considered as a sign of resumption and normalization of civil-military relations in South America. In Brazil, the purchase of the Griphen fighters constitutes the highest point of that recapitalization and modernization of arms.

Although there are possible pressures arising from the correlation that some neighboring countries to Chile and Venezuela can make between

arms modernization and border disputes or historical rivalries, fundamentally the build-up seeks to improve the position and regional political profile, especially in Brazil, which has more global objectives among the South American countries, and Venezuela, with its commitment to build a space for its regional leadership. In this sense, two paths appear as fundamental to achieving these goals: modernizing their military capabilities and strengthening strategic ties and partnerships with governments as global suppliers of advanced military equipment. Even so, there is no necessary relationship between political objectives and military conditions. The case of Chile illustrates this well: even with an accelerated modernization of its Armed Forces, which has included strong purchases of sophisticated weapons, its political objectives for regional leadership are very limited and discrete.

However, a unique theoretical consequence of the South American arms build-up is that it also puts pressure in conceptual contributions that separate the two South American subsystems. As most of these dual analysis are based on a relationship between the nature of the political system (the impact of domestic redemocratization especially, which is quite clear in the case of liberal and constructivist analysis) and a type of cooperative security relationship that tends to derive from the democratic nature of the system, they lead not only to a securitization of relations in the Andean regional sub-complex, but also tend to empty the democratic agenda as a tool for security and foreign policy. The truth is that by splitting the South American system, that type of analysis does not realize that the debate on this item is all over the South America “For these reasons the changes that happened beginning in the late 1980s and that have continued in the 21st century are truly remarkable. In a little more than a decade, democracy has gone from being an internal matter to a subject of intense deliberation in regional forums” (Arceaneaux and Pion-Berlin 2005, 87).

In fact, if we look at the contemporary South American arms build-up, there are characteristics in common with both geographic spaces that, instead of fragmenting them theoretically, end up giving them certain contiguity. Both spaces have actors concerned with military goals; although these goals do not have strong traditional ambitions; in both spaces, State actors that have deepened the modernization of their Armed Forces – Chile and Venezuela – however, eventually raise concerns among neighbors, due to perceptions of threats that go back to the past; both security subsystems have developed CBMs with their neighbors, although it may be stressed that these are more consistent in the Southern Cone than in the Andean region. The difference between South American security subsystems seems to be more related to political stability than to regional security aspects. Certainly, the

Andean subsystem, since the 1990s, shows a greater degree of political instability than political systems of the Southern Cone.

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## ABSTRACT

Research that focuses on security systems in South America usually identifies the existence of two regional security subsystems: one in the Andean countries of the North, with more traditional characteristics such as militarized tensions at the borders and intense drug trafficking problems; and a second one located in the Southern Cone, with security and integration regimes, which could qualify as a security community. This is what we call a dualistic view of security. This paper challenges this thesis to show that contemporary developments and concerns about the purchase of sophisticated weaponry by some South American countries, especially Chile, Venezuela, and Brazil in the first two decades of this century are critical points for the idea of a permanent (democratic) peace zone located only in the Southern Cone. In fact, arms purchases transform the South American region into a single regional security complex with tensions and militarized representations in both the Andean system and the Southern Cone.

## KEYWORDS

Dualistic view. Weapons. South America. Security.

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