

ARGENTINA AND THE ZONE OF PEACE AND COOPERATION OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC (ZOPACAS)

Gladys Lechini¹

Introduction²

Throughout its recent history, Argentina has had a foreign policy that has varied in styles and orientations according to the current governments up to the present. Dominated by impulses, spasmodic, reactive rather than proactive and lacking in continuity, it was very subject to domestic variations and systemic changes. In the same way, and because it sometimes has an “inertial” character, it made it possible for some officials of medium or high rank to make decisions that competed with their bureaucratic areas of influence, developing a personal activism that allowed the implementation of external actions that did not have political or economic costs.

However, there are some issues that, although cannot be considered “State policy”, have been present throughout Argentine history since the second postwar, such as the claim of sovereignty over the Malvinas³ and the Antarctic issue. With variable intensity and different strategies, the Malvinas theme is a constant in the designs of the Argentine Foreign Policy (AFP), and since these islands are located in the South Atlantic, the issue is directly linked to the Argentine interests in the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (Zopacas, in Spanish), and although it is less explicit, in the designs of approaching African countries. These shifts in priorities and orientations move between those who hold positions more inclined to coope-

¹ Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, National University of Rosario, Argentina. E-mail: gladystlechini@yahoo.com.ar

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³ When the Argentine claim for the sovereignty of the Malvinas Islands is mentioned, it also refers to South Georgia, South Sandwich Islands and adjacent territories.

rate with the developing world, seeking to expand the margins of autonomy through South-South Cooperation policies and those that privilege relations with the North.

Consequently, in this descriptive-explanatory work that deals with Argentina and Zopacas, a review of Argentine decisions and actions focused on the South Atlantic will first be made, taking into account the Malvinas issue and the place of Africa, mainly South Africa, and of the countries of the west African coast in the domestic and international concerns of the Argentine governments. Likewise, the positions of the governments of Argentina in the three most visible moments of activity in the Zone are shown to contextualize the interest of Buenos Aires. Temporary emphasis will be placed on the period that began with the recovery of democracy in 1983, a date relevant to Argentine history and close to the creation of Zopacas.

Here it is argued that despite a constant presence, Argentina has had a low profile in the Zopacas, following the actions of Brazil, due to its relatively low interest in the maritime issues of the South Atlantic and in the countries of the west African coast. Only the claim for the sovereignty of the Malvinas, Georgia and South Sandwich Islands – a constant question in the AFP – and substitute issues such as the care of the resources of the area and regional disarmament, appear as the most important incentive to justify their participation. Promoting a Zopacas free of weapons and nuclear submarines, control of fishing, exploitation of hydrocarbons and promotion of a safe environment are part of the Argentine external agenda, directly touching the dispute over the islands and the British presence. However, attention to these issues shows a pendulum movement, depending on the different governments and the systemic changes.

Consequently, some aspects that show Argentina's growing concerns in the South Atlantic, the different proposals for multilateral coordination in which it has participated, conditioned by the AFP towards Malvinas and the relationship with the countries of the eastern Atlantic coast will be addressed initially. They will be the explanatory context to position the Argentine interest and action in the Zopacas.

Argentina looking towards the South Atlantic

The South Atlantic is essential for Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and the coastal states of Africa, both because it is an access route to world markets and because it is part of its economic and strategic interests and as a key to

accessing Antarctica. New global and regional realities such as the need for renewable natural resources and alternative energy sources, such as changes in global shipping patterns and technologies and possible conflicts could further increase the strategic value of the region in the future (Hang and Dojas 2016).

Argentina has a border of 4,725 km of coastline and an approximate 6,500,000 km² of continental shelf, which, in addition to its immensity, stands out for the possibilities of finding hydrocarbon reserves, different types of minerals and their biodiversity. Despite this intrinsic value, from Argentina there has been a deficit in attention to the South Atlantic. Argentina has long been a country that looked inward, turned to the agriculture that provided it with resources, while the exit to the sea was only thought through the ports of export. Mining was added later, which contributed to deepen that perspective, due to the location of these resources, mainly in the Andean zone. As Terribile (2016) points out, “Argentine society has lived with its back to the sea, so it does not conceive the sea as an opportunity given that it was not educated under the concept of insularity of the territory it inhabits.”⁴

However, some thinkers like Admiral Storni (2009), early in the twentieth century, already warned about the potential of the sea and the use of the Atlantic, taking into account the geographical orientation of Argentina to the sea, as you can read in his book “*Intereses Argentinos en el Mar*”, published for the first time in 1916.

Likewise, there were some attempts by the State to establish different instruments to regulate and control the Argentine sea, accompanied by internationally accepted provisions. Among them are decrees 1,386/44 and 14,708/46 and laws 17,094/66 and 23,968/91. Finally, Law N° 24,815/97 created the National Commission of the External Limit of the Continental Shelf (COPLA, in Spanish) that carried out investigations and exploration work that concluded in April 2009 with the presentation to the United Nations of a report for the its evaluation and approval of the new limits of the Continental Platform (PC, in Spanish). Also worth mentioning is article 235 of the new Civil and Commercial Code of 2014, where reference is made to international conventions and special laws⁶.

4 “La sociedad argentina ha vivido de espaldas al mar, por ello no concibe al mar como una oportunidad dado que no fue educada bajo el concepto de insularidad del territorio que habita”.

5 Comisión Nacional del Límite Exterior de la Plataforma Continental (COPLA).

6 For further detail see Covelli (2017)

In this context, and taking the example of the tradition of intra-ministerial cooperation in Antarctic activities, on April 21, 2014, President Cristina Fernández presented the *Pampa Azul* initiative, aimed at establishing and implementing a multi-year strategy that prioritizes geographic areas and thematic issues of national interest in the South Atlantic. The objective was to strengthen the presence of the State in the Continental Shelf and other maritime spaces under national jurisdiction, through the development of a strategic research program in the Argentine Sea and to promote technological innovations that can be applied for a sustainable exploitation of natural resources and the development of industries linked to the sea.

Within its priority areas, the *Pampa Azul Initiative* pays special attention to the continental slope, which it defines as “**Blue Hole**”⁷, being the largest and most productive of the marine fronts. The Burdwood-Namuncurá Bank⁸, the San Jorge Gulf, the sub-Antarctic maritime areas⁹ and the Buenos Aires Estuaries are also taken into account (Figuroa, 2015). In turn, this initiative also has an international dimension, as it seeks cooperation between foreign vessels and national research programs, the promotion of international scientific relations, sharing research and conservation of marine cetaceans and predators.

Nevertheless, beyond these scientific-technological aspects, international cooperation in the South Atlantic has its antecedents in the dimension of security, which became the center of the projects, varying its content in terms of systemic changes. From a restricted security approach to the ideological-military aspects, it has been progressively expanded to consider aspects related to democratic stability, economic development and a safe environment, later including the issues of terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime and human trafficking. New partners have also been incorporated: from a bounded participation to the “American” hemisphere to a more comprehensive one, that includes the west African coast.

The cooperation efforts date back to 1967, with the creation of the South Atlantic Maritime Area (AMAS) among the four countries of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay). Subsequently, an attempt was made to incorporate racist South Africa on the African coast

7 Limited to the north by the confluence of the currents of Brazil and Malvinas, it extends to the south, borders the Malvinas Islands and then takes the west along the Malvinas Channel until reaching the Isla de los Estados and Tierra del Fuego.

8 It is a submarine plateau located about 150 kilometers east of the Isla de los Estados.

9 The maritime spaces of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands are within the scope of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

in the frustrated project of the creation of the South Atlantic Treaty Organization (OTAS)¹⁰ and more recently in the new *Operativos Atlas Sur* (South Atlas Operational), which had the participation of the South African Navy and which will be addressed below.

From the process of democratic transition that began in South Africa, the Argentine government of President Menem decided to restore diplomatic relations with Pretoria on 8 August 1991. They had been cut during the government of President Alfonsín, May 22 1986, as an act of protest by the democratic government against the abuses of the white Apartheid regime. However, the same had not happened with the existing links between the respective navies. With the excuse of continuing relations with his South African counterpart to sustain the transoceanic communications exercises, regular since the 60s, at the Argentine Consulate in South Africa a navy Captain was accredited as Vice Consul of Maritime Affairs, legal figure created for these circumstances and unknown in Public International Law¹¹.

In this new diplomatic context between February 17 and 28, 1993, the first combined naval exercises were carried out in Argentine waters. Brazil and Uruguay did not accept the Argentine invitation because the Apartheid government had not yet left South Africa. These states would be added after the multi-racial elections and Mandela's victory in South Africa.

In this way, in May 1995, the combined *AtlasSur II* operation was carried out with naval exercises off the coast of Cape Town¹². From then on, the following operations took place: in 1999, *Atlasur IV*, in Brazil; in 2002, *Atlasur V*, in South Africa; in 2006, *Atlasur VI* in Montevideo; in 2008, *Atlasur VII*, in South Africa; in 2010, *Atlasur VIII*, in Argentina; in 2012, *Atlasur IX*, in Montevideo in 2014, *Atlasur X* in Brazil and in 2018, *Atlasur XI* in South Africa¹³.

The Malvinas' issue

The international cooperation in the South Atlantic had in its sights the Argentine demand for the rights over the Malvinas Islands, an issue that

¹⁰ On OTAS, see Pereira and Barbosa (2012, 72), Moneta (1980, 18), Lechini (2006) and Leysens (1992).

¹¹ Consult Lechini (1995).

¹² It should be remembered that South Africa is an observer in the AMAS.

¹³ On this occasion, Argentina did not participate in the operation due to financial problems.

is part of one of the central themes of the PEA, being present as a Transitory Disposition of the National Constitutional, since the reform of 1994.

It should be recalled that the “Alegato Ruda” was the first organic presentation to the United Nations, which took note of its existence. As a result, on December 16, 1965, the General Assembly approved Resolution 2065 (XX), in which Argentina and the United Kingdom were invited to conduct negotiations on sovereignty, taking into account the interests of the population of the Malvinas. This situation changed radically with the 1982 conflict and the breakdown of diplomatic relations with Great Britain¹⁴. A decade after the end of the conflict, Argentina began a new diplomatic path towards the resumption of negotiations with Great Britain, with the Malvinas being a subject on the Argentine agenda in the framework of all the official visits made, as well as in all international instances, regional and inter-regional where it was possible to place the issue. To be highlighted: the Special Committee on Decolonization (C24), the General Assembly of the United Nations, the OAS, MERCOSUR, UNASUR, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the South America-Arab Countries Summit (ASPA), the South America-Africa Summit (ASA), the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Group of 77 and China, the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE) and the Zopacas, among other.

From the restoration of consular (1989) and diplomatic relations (1990) with Great Britain¹⁵, a reserve formula or sovereignty safeguard was agreed on the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime spaces. Nevertheless, despite these commitments, which established that in order to carry out acts related to the exploitation of resources in the area there would be communication, the United Kingdom implemented actions that violated the negotiations.

¹⁴ Great Britain never echoed UN resolutions and has not renounced its claims in the Atlantic, where the Malvinas represents the key to accessing Antarctica. With the restoration of democracy in 1983, Argentina resumed its peaceful claim to sovereignty and repeatedly expressed its willingness to resume negotiations according to the UN mandate, but the United Kingdom continues to ignore the request. Unaware of the bilateral character of the sovereignty dispute established by the UN resolutions, the United Kingdom invokes the principle of the self-determination of the peoples, refuses to negotiate the solution of the controversy, subjecting it to the decision of the inhabitants of the islands. Here it is clarified that said principle is inapplicable because the population in question is not native, but are colonists transplanted from the metropolis.

¹⁵ These are the so-called Madrid Accords. In Madrid I (1989) consular relations, air and maritime communications were resumed and commercial and financial restrictions were lifted. The Madrid II Agreement (1990) restores diplomatic relations.

One of the most important points of the Zopacas is the intention to discourage the presence of armed forces outside the zone as well as its denuclearization, as called for in Resolution 41/11 of 1986 of the General Assembly of the United Nations on Zopacas, and subsequent resolutions on the subject.

For Argentina, this aspect of the Zone is very important, especially in the dispute with the United Kingdom, since London has militarized the islands by increasing the troops stationed in the archipelago and the different defense systems installed. Moreover, the presence of Royal Navy ships and submarines with nuclear capacity in the area violate the exhortations made by the United Nations as well as by the coastal States. Functionally, this situation is of strategic utility for Argentina as a form of pressure towards the United Kingdom in pursuit of a peaceful and satisfactory solution to the historic conflict.

Getting this issue included in the resolutions of the Zopacas is relevant because the favorable vote of the African countries, and mainly of the members of the Commonwealth, is a point in favor. The final statements are also useful to oppose the policies of Great Britain in the area; that is the fact that it is a zone of peace, the existence of a fortress with visits of nuclear submarines and/or with nuclear weapons is in clear opposition to this concept. In addition, fishing agreements and care for the environment are also included in the Argentine agenda, questioning Great Britain.

Argentina and the African impulses

Regarding the partners on the other coast of the South Atlantic, the AFP shows a pattern of relations marked by the dynamics of impulses, generating a spasmodic relationship with highs (impulses) and lows (inertia and no politics). During the impulses, embassies were opened, diplomatic and commercial missions were sent and received, and trade increased. However, this set of actions did not generate a critical mass that would promote the design of strategies for the States of Africa, because the impulses responded to specific initiatives, which then vanished (Lechini 2006).

The reference to Argentina's relations with African countries becomes relevant to demonstrate that the creation of Zopacas emerged at a time of Argentine rapprochement with Africa, within the framework of an impulse that promoted the rupture of diplomatic relations with racist South Africa and brought it closer to the States of sub-Saharan Africa. The ways in which

different and successive governments designed foreign policy, and the little and variable relevance given to South-South relations, shaped the low profile of Argentine-African relations both at the level of discourse and actions¹⁶.

The first antecedent that showed interest in an approach to Africa was the sending, in 1960, of the then Argentine ambassador to the United Nations, Mario Amadeo, to the independence festivities of Zaire and Somalia. In this way the first African impulse began to take shape, which entailed the elaboration of the “Plan of Argentine presence in Africa”, which already advised, in 1961 (when only 27 African states were independent), to orient the Argentinean gaze to that continent, which was why the Llamazares mission was sent. The second impulse occurred in 1965, during the government of Arturo Illia, when Ambassador Carlos Alberto Leguizamón presided over another special mission to the African continent. In this decade, several embassies were created. The third impulse was the commercial mission in charge of the councilors Ramiro Arias and Rodolfo Potente, in 1974, during the presidency of Juan Domingo Perón.

During the military government (1976-1983), there was the fourth impulse, with several trade missions that signed the first cooperation agreements with countries of Black Africa, within the framework of a dominant concern in the AFP of the time: the closure of the traditional markets for the protectionist policies of subsidies of the European Economic Community. Africa was thus perceived as an alternative market.

In 1982, with the Malvinas crisis, the African states that until then had been considered marginal in the AFP, received several political missions of good will and invitations for the heads of State to visit Buenos Aires, to get their support in the General Assembly of the United Nations when dealing with the Malvinas case. This fifth impulse made African States the object of “diplomatic use.”

Just as regular diplomatic practice shows that African votes for the Malvinas and the search for new markets appear underlying to the impulses, there is another issue that could be considered a constant until the eighties, referring to the relationship with South Africa. Buenos Aires maintained a dual policy for South Africa and an ambiguous policy towards African countries in relation to the apartheid regime. The dual policy was to maintain a condemnatory multilateral discourse and action of apartheid and good bilateral relations with the white South African government. The ambiguous policy sought to avoid taking radical attitudes with Pretoria for its racist policy.

¹⁶ For Argentine-African relations see Lechini (1986 and 2006).

However, during the government of Raúl Alfonsín, the rupture of diplomatic relations with South Africa on May 22, 1986 marked the end of the ambiguities between the countries of the so-called Black Africa and South Africa. It constituted the sixth impulse, which aimed to consolidate itself as a policy, by developing a series of actions that were framed in a foreign policy design where the Non-Aligned and the third world had a place. Among the gestures are the Argentinean trips at the presidential and ministerial levels, such as the one of Alfonsín to Algeria in October 1984 – which constituted the first official visit of an Argentinian head of state to Africa – and his attendance at the summit of the Non-Aligned, in Zimbabwe (Harare, 1986)¹⁷. At that time, the visits of the *Fragata Libertad* intensified ports in west Africa.

In this political context of democracy and rupture with South Africa, the Argentine participation in Non-Aligned summit and the South Atlantic, together with the defense of the Malvinas issue, took on a new dimension, which contributed to the Argentine participation in Zopacas, a project that clearly excluded South Africa, pointing it out as an aggressor of world peace.

During the administration of Carlos Menem, throughout the 1990s, there were no strategies for Africa: it was the moment of the “politics of no politics”¹⁸. Nevertheless, to this decline of the political profile in the countries of Black Africa a no lesser detail must be contrasted: the restoration of diplomatic relations with South Africa, on August 8, 1991, and the subsequent reopening of the Argentine embassy. This impulse was reaffirmed by Menem’s trip to South Africa on February 24, 1995, which made him the first president of an American country to officially visit the new democracy.

During the first decade of the 21st century, a new impulse seemed to start to develop with initiatives tending to facilitate bilateral relations, such as the opening of embassies (in Angola and Mozambique) or the reopening in Ethiopia and the signing of agreements. However, despite the visit of foreign ministers and senior officials on the continent, between 2003 and 2012 there were only two presidential trips to Africa. In 2008, the president visited North-Saharan Africa in a multi-sector trade mission and in 2012, he arrived in Luanda, Angola, to participate in the Argentine Business Fair. On the other hand, the Presidents of Angola and Equatorial Guinea and

¹⁷ Dante Caputo was the first foreign minister who made a trip to sub-Saharan Africa in 1988. Scientific and technological cooperation missions were also sent and received, and the commercial relationship increased.

¹⁸ The diplomatic relationship was restricted to those countries with which Argentina maintained a constant commercial link and important amounts, such as Nigeria or South Africa. Thus, a direct link was maintained between the political-diplomatic profile and the pragmatic approach of external relations, with a trade balance favorable to Argentina.

high-ranking authorities as ministers and foreign ministers were received in Buenos Aires. In each of these bilateral meetings, as well as in multilateral spheres, the adscription to CSS was highlighted in the discourse and the Malvinas issue was “placed” on the agenda in the terms that the search for consensus allowed.

The government that took office on December 10, 2015 has not yet shown great changes in terms of relations with Africa, deepening the already initiated approach with the design of the Africa Plan 2016-2019 and the progress in cooperation in science and technology and agro-industry¹⁹. Key issues for the foreign policy of the Macri government have been the organization of the Ministerial Summit of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2017, the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, in November 2018 and the BAPA+40 meeting on South-South Cooperation in March 2019. In this context, there were also rapprochements with African countries, in particular with South Africa, which received the visit of the Argentine president invited to the BRICS meeting in July 2018.

In addition, the work done by the Argentina’s Sherpa in the G20, Pedro Villagra Delgado, who traveled to South Africa and Ethiopia, deserves a special mention. In Pretoria, he participated with his counterpart, Anil Sooklal, in a discussion table on the development priorities of the continent with representatives of the African Union (AU), NEPAD and non-governmental organizations that will participate in the civil forums T20 (academic community) and B20 (business). In Addis Ababa, he visited the headquarters of the AU and, in this context, led a workshop on the priorities of Africa, organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

Argentina in the Zopacas: Scenarios and positions

Finally, this section will review the Argentine context and the positions proposed in the Zopacas meetings, based on the three periods of greatest activity since its appearance. It is important to mention that the Zopacas²⁰ was created in a context of the Cold War with the idea of moving the South

19 This strategy intends to integrate the cooperation programs developed by the national State, adding innovative modalities, such as triangular cooperation (either with multilateral or regional organizations or with countries), public-private partnerships and civil society organizations.

20 Its members are Angola, Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Namibia, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leona, South Africa, Togo, Uruguay and Zaire.

Atlantic away from nuclear threats and preventing the growing militarization of the region, given the presence of extra-regional powers. Great Britain, on the west coast, affirming its presence in the “Malvinas Fortress” after the 1982 conflict and the two superpowers with a direct and indirect involvement in the Angolan civil war, on the west African coast. Likewise, the presence of the South African racist government and its permanent interventions in the countries of the region constituted another focus of permanent instability.

The statement supported the position of keeping the South Atlantic out of the East-West confrontation through the non-militarization of the region, and urged the militarily important states to the eventual reduction of military force, the elimination of nuclear presence and the definition of mechanisms to intensify cooperation, security, peace and development, considering that these issues are related and inseparable.

The first period (1986-1992) had two meetings: in Brasilia, Brazil (1988) and in Abuja, Nigeria (1990). After the latter and with the end of the Cold War, the South Atlantic lost strategic-military relevance and the initiative was practically abandoned.

When Brazil devised the Zopacas, Argentina defined its position in front of the African countries with the rupture of diplomatic relations with South Africa, having raised an approach to the Third World and the Non-Aligned and a strong claim for the Malvinas cause in the bilateral and multilateral instances. In this context, the Brasilia meeting succeeded in placing a paragraph where the member states

[...] express their concern at the fact that the negotiations between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have not yet begun despite the repeated appeals of resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, with a view to finding the means of resolving peacefully and definitively the remaining problems between both countries, including all aspects of the future of the Malvinas Islands, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and urging the full implementation of said resolutions (General Assembly of the United Nations -UNGA- 1988, 5)²¹.

21 Own translation. In the original: “[...] expresan su preocupación por el hecho que las negociaciones entre los Gobiernos de la Argentina y del Reino Unido de Gran Bretaña e Irlanda del Norte no se hayan iniciado todavía a pesar de los repetidos llamamientos de resoluciones de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, con miras a hallar los medios de resolver pacífica y definitivamente los problemas pendientes entre ambos países, incluso todos los aspectos sobre el futuro de las Islas Malvinas, de conformidad con la Carta de las Naciones Unidas, y urgen la aplicación plena de dichas resoluciones” (Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas –AGNU- 1988, 5).

During the government of Carlos Menem, there was a change in the orientation of the Argentine foreign policy and in the strategies to defend the Malvinas issue. In the first case, the relationship with the United States and Western power centers was privileged, abandoning Africa, because it was not functional to Argentine interests. In the second case, the negotiation strategy with the United Kingdom was changed, withdrawing from multi-lateral instances and seeking a bilateral route with London. For this reason, the Nigerian meeting did not specify the claim of sovereignty, showing only “satisfaction at the beginning of the negotiations” to re-establish relations with the United Kingdom. Only in paragraphs 17 and 18 were there concerns about the military concentration in the Malvinas area to sustain the South Atlantic as a zone of peace²². The Argentine strategies were also reflected in the elevated positions to the Secretary General for their annual reports on Zopacas to the General Assembly. From a position in which unilateral actions were criticized, in 1990, a “Working Group on South Atlantic Affairs” was created with Great Britain (UNGA 1990, 4). In spite of this, in 1991 the continuity of the colonial situation of the islands, which affected the territorial integrity of Argentina (UNGA 1991), was highlighted.

During the **Second Stage (1992-1998)**, the meetings were held in Brasilia (1994), Somerset West, South Africa (1996) and Buenos Aires (1998). The foreign policy of President Menem prioritized in his agenda to recover relations with the United Kingdom and the reintegration of Argentina into the world. Following the formula of “sovereignty umbrella”, it did not seek to put pressure on the Malvinas issue in the different international forums. However, after the meeting in South Africa, at the inaugural session of the 51st Assembly of the UN, on September 23, 1996, Foreign Minister Di Tella called for the beginning of “a new era in the South Atlantic” based on the cooperation and in the elimination of tensions, alluding to the delays in the resolution of the sovereignty dispute over the islands. Di Tella emphasized “the natural interest of Argentina in the South Atlantic” that is reflected in the participation in the “zone of peace and cooperation of the region”.

[...] The member States of the zone have committed ourselves to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity and to promote democracy, human rights and civil liberties, as well as to join forces in favor of non-proliferation and denuclearization and to cooperate in the fight against drug trafficking [...]

22 Final Document of the Second Meeting of States of the Zopacas A/45/474

[...] Argentina is firmly convinced that a new era should begin in the South Atlantic, as an area free of tensions, a meeting place for diverse cultures committed to humanistic ideals and to the common desire for progress and well-being (Di Tella 1996)²³.

The last meeting of this period was held in Buenos Aires between October 21 and 22, 1998, maintaining the presidency of the group until 2007, since its members did not meet again until then. It is interesting to note the context in which it was organized, since the Menem government had no interest in the countries of the west African coast and only in South Africa²⁴ and the southern African region, as well as Malvinas was not on the agenda of that meeting. The low profile was demonstrated by the absence of Foreign Minister Di Tella at the meeting, being represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Andrés Cisneros, while South African Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo and Abdul Minty, Deputy Director General of Multilateral Affairs, had traveled to Buenos Aires for the transfer of the presidency.

In this regard, only some conjectures that derive from personal interviews with several Argentine officials at that time can be advanced. Despite the low profile granted to the area, the Zopacas was considered by officials of the intermediate level Foreign Ministry an interesting political area, a virgin field to develop strategies with Brazil and approaching Atlantic Africa, allowing to reaffirm the Argentine presence in the South Atlantic. Participating in Zopacas, in some way could mean, with very low cost, a claim against the transatlantic partners, before the abrupt departure of the Non-Aligned in 1991, in Accra. As was foreseeable in the Final Declaration of Buenos Aires, no mention was made of the Malvinas situation.

Despite this dismissive attitude regarding the claims, the colonial situation of the Malvinas Islands is not forgotten. In the position reports submitted to the Secretary General regarding the Zopacas, in 1994, Argentina recalled the existence of the colonial situation of the Malvinas Islands.

23 Own translation. In the original: “[...] Los Estados miembros de la zona nos hemos comprometido a respetar la soberanía e integridad territorial y a fomentar la democracia, los derechos humanos y las libertades civiles, así como a aunar esfuerzos en pro de la no proliferación y la desnuclearización y a cooperar en la lucha contra el narcotráfico [...]”

[...] La Argentina está firmemente convencida de que debe iniciarse una nueva era en el Atlántico Sur, como área libre de tensiones, lugar de encuentro de culturas diversas comprometidas con los ideales humanistas y con el deseo común de progreso y bienestar” (Di Tella 1996).

24 The Argentine participation in the South Atlas Operations with South Africa escaped the scope of the Foreign Ministry and responded to the interests of the navy, with a long tradition of cooperation with South Africa.

This declaration was maintained in the following years, where the following stood out:

the permanent efforts deployed by Argentina in favor of cooperation, its express will to recover sovereignty by peaceful means and in accordance with the principles of international law, as well as the commitment assumed in its Constitution to respect the way of life of the inhabitants of the Malvinas Islands (UNGA 1994, 4)²⁵.

The **third and last period began in 2007**, after the first meeting of the South American and African countries (ASA Summit) in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2006, when it was decided to call a new ministerial meeting of the Zopacas. For this, preparatory workshops were held: in New York, in Montevideo, Uruguay and in Buenos Aires, between May 7 and 9, 2007 (González 2007).

Finally, the VI Ministerial Meeting of the Zopacas took place on June 18 and 19, 2007 in Angola, culminating in the Luanda Declaration and its Plan of Action. The delegation of Buenos Aires, led by Deputy Foreign Minister Roberto García Moritán, handed over the presidency and received the support and solidarity of all the states in the Argentine claim to the Malvinas Islands²⁶.

In the Luanda declaration, Malvinas was again placed on the agenda, expressing the group's solidarity with Argentina, after the silence of the previous stage. With the presidencies of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Argentina made a change of direction in the orientation of the government and in foreign policy²⁷ recovering the look towards the Latin American region and the Global South. Likewise, the path taken by the recovery of sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands was resumed, which was converted into a State policy by taking the issue as a nodal point of the external agenda, and insisting on seeking the greatest support in all forums possible. The two meetings of the Zopacas in Luanda and Montevideo were not unrelated to this purpose.

25 Own translation. In the original: "los permanentes esfuerzos desplegados por Argentina en favor de la cooperación, su voluntad expresa de recuperar la soberanía por medios pacíficos y de acuerdo con los principios del derecho internacional, así como el compromiso asumido en su Constitución de respetar el modo de vida de los habitantes de las Islas Malvinas (AGNU 1994, 4)".

26 It should be recalled that Argentina has an embassy in Luanda, where a defense attaché was being carried out

27 See the works edited by the CERIR on Argentine Foreign Policy (2006, 2010 and 2014)

During the development of the three preparatory workshops and during the VI Ministerial Meeting of the Zopacas, the Argentine government gave relevance to three key issues: the Malvinas issue, the development of Peace Operations mechanisms and, within the framework of the Law of the Sea, the implementation of measures against IUU fishing and the protection of maritime genetic resources. In the last two issues, there were no major disagreements, but these appeared in the Malvinas issue, since until the last moment the inclusion of a text on the issue was being negotiated in the final declaration. The opposition of some African states traditionally allied with Great Britain delayed their acceptance, which was finally included in the declaration, through the note sent by the permanent representative of Argentina to the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Moreover, in the Luanda Final Declaration of 2007, the countries of the Zone urged “the resumption of negotiations between the Governments of the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in accordance with resolution 2065 (XX) of the General Assembly and other relevant resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations concerning the “Issue of the Malvinas Islands, in order to find as soon as possible a peaceful and lasting solution to the sovereignty dispute” (UNGA 2007, 9).

It should be recalled that at the second Africa-South America summit in Venezuela in 2009, the Zone was recognized as an important instrument for peace and security. Subsequently, a Roundtable in Brasilia met in 2010 and organized the last meeting in 2013 in Montevideo, where it was advocated for a fairer and more equitable international trade “, with “improved access to the markets of developed countries”.

As in the previous meeting, the Final Declaration of the Ministerial Meeting of the Zopacas of Montevideo (2013) made it possible for the Member States of the Zone to accompany the Argentine claim, calling for the resumption of negotiations between the affected governments (UNGA, 2013) and resolution 31/49 of the General Assembly was reaffirmed²⁸. In this context, the development of illegitimate hydrocarbon exploration activities in the disputed area was viewed with concern, as was the strengthening of the United Kingdom’s military presence in the area, in violation of General Assembly resolution 31/49 of the United Nations. In the same vein, all references to

²⁸ This resolution requests that the parties that dispute the sovereignty of the Malvinas Islands, Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding marine spaces, refrain from taking decisions that imply the introduction of unilateral changes in the situation.

maintaining the South Atlantic as a nuclear weapon free zone are read in Argentina as a limitation to British military deployment. It is noteworthy that in Montevideo, for the first time, representatives of the Ministries of Defense²⁹ joined the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, including the ministers themselves, in the case of Uruguay, Brazil and Angola.

Regarding cooperation in defense, it was agreed to increase the interaction between the Armed Forces of member countries, through the exchange of information on Defense Policy issues, as well as through exercises and actions that strengthen naval and aerial capabilities. A Working Group was also created to cooperate in peacekeeping operations.

As an activity emanated from this Action Plan, Brazil organized the 1st Seminar on Security and Surveillance of Maritime Traffic and Search and Rescue of the Zopacas (Salvador de Bahía, 15-17 October 2013), which was attended by representatives of all the countries of the Zone, except Guinea Bissau. The Argentine Ministry of Defense assumed an active role in the activities carried out in this field. To this end, in coordination with the Foreign Ministry, a representative of the SSAID and another of the Argentine Navy participated in the Meetings of Montevideo and Salvador de Bahía during 2013.

Also during 2013, the South Atlantic Department, under the Office of the Subsecretariat of International Defense Affairs, Strategy and Military Affairs, was created to deepen the coordination mechanisms between the Ministry of Defense, the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Security, with the participation of representatives of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, of the Argentine Navy, of the Argentine Air Force and the Naval Prefecture of Argentina, to contribute to the maintenance of the South Atlantic as a zone of peace and cooperation, and to guarantee and deepen the Argentine presence in the Argentine Antarctic, from the scope of the jurisdiction (Hekimian, 2013).

In 2014 was also decided to approach BEDS-COLCO (Coordinator of the South Atlantic Maritime Area and Local Operational Commanders) with the navies of African countries Zopacas and especially maritime safety centers in the Gulf of Guinea countries. In this context, the Brazilian Navy organized a Seminar in Rio de Janeiro in June 2016 that had the presence of Argentina, showing good intentions, but overlapping efforts.

To conclude this section it could be affirmed that the commitment of the Argentine participation has been consolidated in parallel to the defense

29 The Ministry of Defense of Argentina was assisted by an official of the Secretariat of International Defense Affairs.

of its increasingly clear interests around the South Atlantic, in spite of the financial and logistical difficulties.

Final thoughts

Throughout this work, it has been observed that even with a relatively low profile in the Zopacas, Argentina managed to place its agenda items in the Declarations and Final Resolutions of the Meetings of this group of countries centered on the South Atlantic. Despite its low interest in the maritime issues of the South Atlantic and an erratic policy towards the countries of the west African coast, the dispute over the sovereignty of the Malvinas, Georgia and South Sandwich Islands and other related issues related to security in a restricted sense, initially, and then expanded, were part of the general agenda of the Zopacas, at the request of the Argentine governments, although this issue had highs and lows in the Argentine agenda according to the governments of the time.

While it is valid to recognize that the Zopacas has also gone through periods of increased activity and others of forgetfulness, depending on the systemic changes and the domestic issues of interest to the coastal countries, it has been and is a useful tool as a “space for encounter” to look for “*comunalidades*” and coincidences between peripheral states with little mutual knowledge.

Although Brazil was the “main driver”, also based on its foreign policy interests and its leadership ambitions in “the South”, the high intensity of the Zopacas showed that political will could generate cooperation flows between both regions on both sides of the Atlantic. This also happened with the Argentine governments. Although they did not give a high profile to their participation in Zopacas, they were not absent and collaborated with the group in parallel to the spasmodic evolution of the cooperation process.

Despite the difficulties of the Zopacas in achieving a certain continuity in the meetings, as well as in the scope of its objectives, Argentina has seen in this forum an area of political agreement to promote “priority” issues, such as the support of its members to the claims for the sovereignty of the Malvinas Islands and the creation of a zone free of nuclear weapons, as well as the protection of the marine environment and the fight against IUU fishing.

In fact, the officials in charge of the International Organizations Directorate of the Foreign Ministry or the Ministry of Defense, as of 2013, presented reports and designed strategies to optimize the Argentine presence

in this forum considered “friendly”. Many times the officials of the Sub-Saharan Africa Directorate and the Malvinas Secretariat participated, showing that, although with a disaggregated structure, actions can be synchronized in pursuit of a foreign policy objective.

The follow-up to the Brazilian initiatives for the creation and successive re-launchings of the Zopacas was developed in the context of good relations with its neighbor of MERCOSUR. Given the zigzags in relations with Africa, the Zopacas was also perceived as a way of approaching African states and mainly South Africa, a state with which Brazil maintains privileged relations through IBSA and BRICS.

The Argentine strategy in the group aimed mainly at obtaining the support of the Latin American and African countries (particularly those with strong connections with London) on the Malvinas Question, preventing an expansion of the British presence in the South Atlantic via their eventual cooperation, with those countries on disarmament and the withdrawal of nuclear submarines from the “Malvinas Fortress”.

It is foreseeable that the Argentine accompaniment policy will continue if progress is made in this area of multilateral articulation, although given the present political-economic conditions of the member countries and of the “regional powers” that would promote it, it is possible to think of the advent of another period of hibernation.

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Abstract

Despite its permanent presence in all ZOPACS meetings, the Argentine government has had a low profile, just following Brazil's initiatives. A relatively low interest in the South Atlantic maritime issues and in the African countries could explain this position. The vindication for the Argentine sovereignty over the Malvinas (Falkland Islands) Georgia and Sandwich – a constant claim in Argentina's Foreign Policy – and other connected matters such as the protection of the sea resources and disarmament, are the main issues that justify the participation of Argentina's governments. Taking into consideration the three more important landmarks which pointed out the Zone's activities, the objective of this paper is to shed light on the domestic and international Argentine positions and actions towards the South Atlantic, taking into consideration the Malvinas issue and the place of African countries and mainly of South Africa and the countries of the western coast of Africa.

Keywords

Argentina; South Atlantic Ocean; Brazil; Malvinas; Falkland Islands; South-South Cooperation; South Africa; Africa.

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