



Brazil's recent agenda on the sea and the South Atlantic contemporary scenario



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ABSTRACT

The goal of this article is to present Brazil's interests and concerns in the South Atlantic, through the analysis of the ongoing governmental plans to its adjacent sea, and the security and defense issues in the ocean region. First, it will introduce four important programs, namely the Proarquipelago, Protrindade, Leplac, and Proarea, launched by the country after the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Then, it will discuss some of the domestic and international initiatives taken by Brazil to build a stable political and economic environment in the South Atlantic. Despite the peaceful purposes of the Brazilian agenda and policy to the sea, there are underlying reasons, such as keeping secure its oil and gas fields and consolidating its role as a major player in the ocean region, that must be considered as well. However, changes in the domestic scenario may provoke unprecedented modifications in this agenda.

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that Brazil has the largest coastline in the South Atlantic (around 9000 km length and a maritime area of 514,000 km²),¹ its advantaged position has nevertheless not led it to become a maritime-oriented state. With undeveloped continental open spaces, Brazil did not feel compelled to turn toward the sea to pursue national development [2]. Brazil's awareness to the ocean management seem to vary from an apparent lack of attention on the one hand to the highest priority on the other in the last fifty years – a wavering political behavior not always easy to understand.

Some critical issues on the law of the sea for Latin American countries such as the claim for an adjacent sea width of 200 nautical miles during the 1960s and 1970s was associated with an erratic policy by the Brazilian authorities [3]. Brazil's position in the three United Nations Conferences on the Law of the Sea (1958, 1960 and 1973–1982) was not consistent, and the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (hereinafter LOS Convention),² in 1982, did not stimulate much interest in the Brazilian society, except from the maritime sectors [4].

However, the entry into force of the LOS Convention in 1994 produced a new agenda for the sea.³ Brazil tried to implement the LOS Convention in the best possible way for its own interests, with a special emphasis on the natural ocean resources and the maritime zones that could result from its distant offshore islands. In this context, four main plans and programs have been launched in the last two decades: the St. Peter and St. Paul Archipelago Program (Proarquipelago), the Trindade Island Program (Protrindade), the Brazilian Continental Shelf Survey Plan (Leplac or the “Blue Amazon”), and the Program for Prospecting and Exploration of Mineral Resources in the Equatorial and South Atlantic International Area (Proarea).

The Brazilian agenda for the sea is not limited to these plans and programs, but takes into account the security and defense initiatives aiming to create a peaceful and stable scenario in the South Atlantic from two perspectives. In the domestic scenario, the military re-equipment, which involves the purchase of a new aircraft carrier and fighter jets, and the construction of a nuclear-powered submarine; and in the international scenario, in the context of the South-South relations framework, bilateral cooperation (in particular with Namibia and Angola) and multilateral initiatives, especially relaunching the Zone of

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¹ According to the *Secretaria Nacional de Unidades de Conservação* – a body of the Brazilian Ministry of Environment. Considering bays and gulfs this figure can reach 10800 km [1].

² United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, done at Montego Bay, Jamaica, December 10, 1982, entered into force November 16, 1994, 1833 United Nations Treaty Series 397.

³ Even before the entry into force of the LOS Convention in 1994, the 1988 Federal Constitution and the 1993 Law no. 1098 put Brazil in full agreement with the new law of the sea framework.

Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZPCSA).

This article is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the plans and programs developed by the Brazilian government in the Atlantic Ocean in the last twenty years. Section 3 moves on to discuss the security and defense initiatives launched virtually in the same period. It is argued that there is a deep connection between the two initiatives, once both aimed to strengthen the Brazilian role in the ocean region. Nonetheless, as considered in the concluding remarks, this agenda, which combines internal affairs and foreign policy seems to gradually lose importance after the rise of the new right-wing government. In a rush to reject the policies developed by the Workers' Party (or *Partido dos Trabalhadores*) – which governed the country from 2003 to 2016 – the current government first steps move towards other economic and political partners and geopolitical horizons.

2. Brazil's recent developments on the sea

The cornerstone of the Brazilian interests in the sea is the National Policy on Marine Resources (or *Política Nacional para os Recursos do Mar*, PNRM) which direct the development of activities for the effective use, exploration and exploitation of living, mineral and energy resources in territorial waters, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf.

The PNRM essentially seeks to establish principles and aims for use in designing government plans, programs and action pertaining to human resource training, the development of marine research, science and technology and the exploration and sustainable use exploitation of marine resources. Additionally, the PNRM defines actions to attain the goals set out in this policy [5].

The first PNRM (entitled 'General Guidelines of the National Policy on Marine Resources') was launched in 1980. The second and current PNRM was only established twenty-five years later, by the Decree no. 5377 (23 Feb. 2005). The three PNRM goals – instead of the eight in 1980 – are to promote the development of human resources; to stimulate the development of marine research, science and technology; and, to encourage the exploration and sustainable use of sea resources [5].⁴

The PNRM outlines the framework, but the actions are carried out under the sectoral plans (or *Plano Setorial para os Recursos do Mar*, PSRM) that run for four years. The plans and programs that will be discussed below are among those actions. The first PSRM was launched for 1982–1985; the current is the ninth (IX PSRM, 2016–2019) [6].

In accordance with the goals and guidelines of the PNRM, the focus of the previous eight sectoral plans was in the generation of knowledge about the marine environment and human resources training. It had sought to support the sustainable use of living and non-living resources in the seabed, subsoil and superjacent waters, on the coastal areas, adjacent sea and other marine areas of national interests.

The IX PSRM keeps the participative management, including ministries, funding agencies, the academic and scientific community, and private initiatives represented either in the preparation or implementation of joint actions, according to their respective competences and the guidelines established in the PNRM, as well as in other related policies and plans.

The main body for the coordination of matters relating to the achievement of the PNRM is the Inter-Ministerial Commission for Sea Resources (CIRM), which works also as an executing body of the plans and programs. The CIRM is a multidisciplinary unit supervised by the Navy and has a Secretariat (SECIRM), which gathers and executes all the activities in the programs. It tries to connect staff from the different ministries, provinces' governments, research institutions, scientific community, and private entities, depending upon their respective

⁴ The PNRM does not cover maritime goods shipping, which is governed by specific policies and legal standards.

competencies. Besides its objective to assist the Presidency in the execution of the PNRM, the CIRM proposes the general rules of this policy and suggests possible changes, acting as a coordinator between the public and the private sector to attain the necessary support for the execution of the PNRM actions. This policy consolidates the CIRM efforts to undertake measures for the integration of the maritime areas to Brazil as a geographical whole and to enhance qualitatively the use of marine resources [7].

The Brazilian agenda and policies on maritime matters cover several plans and programs⁵ – established, coordinated and executed by the CIRM. However, this article will focus only on four of these, as the best examples of the interest in the country's adjacent sea. The first two concern scientific research and aim to improve the Brazilian presence in the Atlantic through a more effective occupation of its distant oceanic islands. The last two plans deal with a more economic and sustainable development approach for the natural resources of the sea.

2.1. Archipelago of St. Peter and St. Paul Program (*Proarquipelago*)

To strengthen its presence in the Atlantic, Brazil launched St. Peter and St. Paul Archipelago Program (*Proarquipelago*) by Resolution no. 1/1996 of the CIRM [8]. The establishment of this program and the rush for a permanent occupation in the isolated group of islets in the Atlantic are justified by the fact that until 1996 St. Peter and St. Paul were known – and are still delineated in most world maps – as rocks, not islands.

The suite of rocky islets is Brazil's closest point to Africa, and is located about 1100 km from Natal, Rio Grande do Norte province, approximately 1800 km from the African coast. This remote group of rocks near the equator occupies a total area of about 0.17 km² and the distance between its end points is about 420 m. It is an unwelcoming site, devoid of beaches, vegetation and fresh water, and subject to bad weather conditions [9]. The area around the archipelago, the Fernando de Noronha archipelago and the Rocas Atoll were declared an Environmental Protection Area (APA) by Decree no. 92755 (5 June 1986) [10].

When the *Proarquipelago* was created, the first step was to build a permanent scientific station in the area, which would be developed into a systematic scientific research site and then permanently occupied. The program scope includes conducting a continuous platform of scientific research in the region, encompassing geology, geophysics, biology, fisheries resources, oceanography, meteorology, and seismology [11].

⁵ Other plans and programs established in the recently period include: Revimar in 2005 (*Avaliação, Monitoramento e Conservação da Biodiversidade Marinha* or Evaluation, Monitoring and Conservation of Marine Biodiversity), which the main goal is “to establish the scientific basis and integrated actions able to support policies and actions for conservation and joint management strategies for sustainable use of marine living resources”; Aquipesca in 2005 (*Aquicultura e Pesca* or Aquaculture and Fisheries) which seeks “to foster, in a cooperative environment among ministries, the implementation of priority actions of the Sustainable Development Plan for Fisheries and Aquaculture, in order to qualify manpower resources in fishing activities, adjust fishing effort and encourage mariculture”; Biomar also in 2005 (*Biotechnologia Marinha* or Marine Biotechnology) which objectives are “to foster and support the sustainable use of the biotechnological potential of marine biodiversity found in waters under national jurisdiction and other areas of national interests aiming at the scientific, technological and economic development”; Goos/Brasil in 1997 (*Sistema Brasileiro de Observação dos Oceanos e Clima* or Brazilian Ocean and Climate Observation Plan) which the goal is “to expand and consolidate a system for observing the oceans, atmosphere and coastal zones, so as to improve scientific knowledge, make collected data available and provide support to studies, forecasts and actions, thus helping to reduce risks and vulnerabilities arising from extreme events, climate variability and climate changes affecting Brazil”; Promar (*Promoção da Mentalidade Marinha* or Marine Mentality Program) which pursues “to stimulate the development of a marine mentality in the Brazilian population”; PPG-Mar in 2005 (*Formação de Recursos Humanos em Ciências do Mar* or Human Resources Capacitation in Marine Sciences) which the goal is “to enhance the capacitation of human resources involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge on the components, processes and resources of the marine environment and transition zones”.

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