

Article

An Ocean Free of Nuclear Weapons? Regional Security Governance in the South Atlantic

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Abstract

Even though oceans are pivotal for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, they constitute a blind spot in the global non-proliferation regime. This article analyses how regional security governance mechanisms may fill such gaps by bringing a maritime focus to non-proliferation studies. With three nuclear-weapons-free zones and one zone of peace surrounding or covering its maritime space, the South Atlantic serves as an illustrative case to understand the provision of security governance for the seas. The article identifies a range of legal, political, and practical challenges that can impede regional initiatives from achieving security sovereignty over maritime spaces. However, while non-proliferation might remain precarious, these mechanisms are not without success, as they serve to establish the opposition to nuclear weapons as a recognised norm, both at the UN level and among the Global South. The narrative of non-proliferation also allows regional states to justify the pursuit of security objectives. The article concludes by outlining the conditions for regional maritime governance to become more effective in terms of non-proliferation.

Keywords

maritime governance; maritime regionalism; non-proliferation; nuclear-weapons-free zones; ocean governance; regional security; South Atlantic; zone of peace

Issue

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1. Introduction

Oceans are pivotal to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Islands and the high seas have repeatedly been used as testing sites and the transport of nuclear weapons has frequently occurred by boat. Yet, maritime spaces constitute an important blind spot in the global non-proliferation regime. It has been notoriously difficult to establish maritime governance mechanisms that are able to curb the spread of nuclear weapons at sea. The Seabed Arms Control Treaty, for example, only covers the ocean floor. Existing international norms limit the scope for ocean governance, such as the principle of “freedom of the seas” that complicates banning the maritime transport of nuclear weapons. A key question,

therefore, surfaces in terms of how to best keep oceans free of nuclear weapons and which kind of governance mechanisms are suitable for such an endgame.

Despite the substantial intricacy that the maritime dimension of non-proliferation entails, this topic has received little attention in both the scholarships of non-proliferation and regional security governance. In our article, we put it at the centre of attention and study how global and regional forms of maritime security governance seek to overcome obstacles to non-proliferation and turn oceans free of nuclear weapons. In doing so, we also seek to explain the limitations and failures of such governance initiatives in achieving maritime non-proliferation while highlighting the direct or indirect implications that such attempts

to fill the maritime gaps of non-proliferation have on regional security configurations.

After an initial discussion on the interlinkages between regional security, maritime spaces and non-proliferation, we turn to the South Atlantic Ocean as an illustrative case to understand core issues in the provision of security governance for the seas. The South Atlantic offers a particularly high density of regional security governance mechanisms in the area of denuclearisation, namely nuclear-weapons-free zones (NWFZs) and zones of peace, which go beyond just the shores of their member states. Following a case study approach, we review existing literature on non-proliferation and ocean governance concerning the Atlantic to identify a range of legal, political, and practical challenges that impede regional initiatives from achieving security sovereignty over maritime spaces. Primary sources of relevance mainly consist of the major regional non-proliferation treaties and their protocols, as well as UN resolutions and domestic policy documentation in this area. Despite the challenges we identify, we also uncover that these initiatives are not without effectiveness. Regional maritime nuclear governance serves to establish the opposition to nuclear weapons as a recognised norm, both at the level of the UN and among the Global South. While actual non-proliferation might still be precarious, the ensuing narrative can be instrumentalised as a veneer for regional states to pursue other security-related objectives, such as keeping external powers at bay and expanding their own sphere of influence. We conclude by outlining the conditions that would be required for regional maritime governance to become more effective in terms of non-proliferation.

2. Regional Security and Maritime Spaces

Although maritime spaces have long been conceptualised as regions by historians (Braudel, 1972; Gilroy, 1993), scholarship on regionalism is characterised by a terra-centric focus. Regions are predominantly defined as an amalgamation of national territories, thus implying that maritime spaces constitute the margins of a region rather than a centre. Although geographers have advocated for a shift toward the ocean to capture social processes (Lambert et al., 2006; Steinberg, 2001), in the dominant reading of international relations and regionalism studies, oceans are essentially dividing lines of regions. This is closely related to the persistence of continental compartmentalisations. The bulk of regionalism studies, whether comparative or not, thinks in categories of African regionalism, Latin American regionalism, etc. (Mattheis, 2017). It is a frequent underlying assumption that regionalisms within one continent share similar traits, thus warranting a corresponding arrangement. As a consequence, regional organisations that span over two or more continents often fall through the cracks or are shoehorned into one existing category. This practice particularly concerns maritime regionalism, i.e.,

region-building projects that delineate their territorialisation around shared waters and are therefore likely to be constituted by riparian states that belong to different continents.

In the field of security, studies on regionalism also remain heavily influenced by the concepts that seek to delineate regions in terra-centric manners, such as regional security communities, regional security complexes, or regional security governance systems (cf. Deutsch, 1957; see also Adler & Barnett, 1998; Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Ceccorulli & Lucarelli, 2014). Although these attempts to compartmentalise the world allow for some overlaps and gradations, their borders are usually congruent with coastlines. However, this is primarily owed to bias in the empirical application of the three concepts, as the underlying theoretical criteria do not exclude oceans *per se*. Regional security communities are based on pronounced interdependence and the ensuing cooperation—or even integration—to jointly solve security concerns (Schoeman & Muller, 2009). Regional security complexes rest on a similar conceptualisation of the impossibility of a state being unaffected by security changes within a specific regional surrounding (Lake, 1997). This concept of interdependence accounts for both negative and positive effects, implying that a complex can both be characterised by a high or low prevalence of conflict. The concept of regional security governance is more concerned with questions of institutionalisation and thus focuses on regions as cooperative spaces where states have deliberately created arrangements to curb conflict (Breslin & Croft, 2012). Regional governance is therefore closely related to the dominant perceptions and conceptions of security within the region, from human to regime security, and therefore reflects existing power constellations and ideologies. For all intended purposes, regional governance serves to legitimise specific security practices and delineations (Ciuță, 2008; Lopez-Lucia, 2020).

In sum, the scholarship on regional security concepts might contain diverse branches and premises, but nothing *a priori* precludes security communities, complexes, and governance systems to develop around a maritime space. Threats can be shared across seas and some threats even relate to the actual waters. A growing perception of such threats, in turn, pushes riparian states to actively cooperate or at least adapt their policies and activities to what is happening within the wider maritime region. This also applies to transversal concepts that are determinant for regional security spaces, such as the notion of regional powers. A regional security space is accordingly defined as the geographic area within which a state holds a sizable power share and within which its capabilities are recognised (Mattheis, 2021). Especially in historic perspectives of imperialism, regional powers would be closely associated with maritime projections.

While a theoretical openness does therefore exist, the terra-centrism typically unfolds in the operational-

isation of regional security concepts. The scholarship's delineation of security communities, complexes and governance systems is essentially exclusive to maritime spaces. This omission can be understood as a manifestation of a more general challenge to acknowledge spaces with a relative absence of statehood. In other words, the study of maritime regionalism has been hampered by an excessive focus on treaty-based regional intergovernmental organisations. The majority of these regional organisations is indeed not designed around a maritime space. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), for one, is not primarily a community focused on the ocean, despite the maritime connotation in its name. In some instances, the terra-centrism of regional organisations even undermines governance in a maritime space. This is particularly striking in the case of the European Union's approach to the Mediterranean, where the securitisation of migration highlights a shift from a maritime space as a shared region to a maritime space as a border. This shift turns movements within a maritime Mediterranean region into threats that are externalisable from a terra-centric European region.

Highlighting the terra-centric and state-centric biases does not entail delineating maritime spaces as regions that are detached from nation-states on the continent (Lobo-Guerrero, 2012). On the contrary, the concept of maritime regionalism encompasses practices and imaginations that transcend these divisions, be it commercial exchanges or popular identities. In this perspective, the sea is not merely an interstitial space that serves as a background to connections between terrestrial places. It can be a central reference point for a region that harbours singular political, economic and security interactions across, on, in, and under the ocean. Accordingly, nation-states play a key role in setting up maritime governance mechanisms. But given the limited jurisdiction outside their territories, they also depend on multilateral cooperation, both with state and non-state actors. Maritime regions are thus not voids. Like the tides, their governance might usually be fluid and ephemeral. However, there are also institutionalised examples of explicit maritime regionalisms, such as the Arctic Council and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, which run counter-current and do not fit into continental categories. Such forms of cooperation indicate the applicability of theoretical concepts related to regional security, as groups of countries that not only share similar perceptions of threats but also a set of security-related norms and a sense of interdependence.

The study of multilateral security governance is therefore caught in what can be described as a "dry geography" (Peters, 2018, p. 505). It has great difficulties to address maritime spaces. At best, they are treated ambiguously and at worst they remain stuck in a blind spot. These hurdles are best illustrated in the next section by turning to an eminently fundamental object of multilateral security governance: the global non-proliferation regime.

3. Non-Proliferation and Maritime Spaces

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) constitutes the global framework to curb nuclear threats, covering numerous policy areas, such as arms control, disarmament, and deterrence. Due to the constraints of international law, its signatories are nation-states that have limited jurisdiction over maritime spaces. As a consequence, oceans only play a minor role in the nuclear order and particularly in governance efforts towards non-proliferation. Moreover, in the nuclear context, the maritime dimension is particularly relevant because non-proliferation is even more difficult to implement and enforce outside of state boundaries than within. Yet, the need for multilateralism is notably justified because oceans matter in three very practical regards: (a) nuclear bases have been erected on remote islands; (b) the high seas have served as nuclear testing sites and nuclear waste dumps (Clary & Panda, 2017; Moody-O'Grady, 1995); and (c) nuclear weapons have been transported by boat (Melocowsky, 2016).

Given the general difficulties of implementing non-proliferation in non-populated areas outside the remit of national sovereignties, specific governance agreements have emerged in the form of regionally delineated NWFZs, first targeting the Antarctic (1959), then the outer space (1967) and afterwards the seabed (1971). These regional security arrangements provided the opportunity to fill some of the maritime gaps, especially in the case of the Antarctic Treaty, which also covers the surrounding waters. By banning nuclear weapons and peaceful nuclear explosions for scientific and industrial purposes, Antarctica became the world's first denuclearised zone (Musto, 2019). The Seabed Treaty put the ocean at the centre of attention but it only concerns the implanting or placing of nuclear weapons on the seabed or ocean floor. While this treaty has important implications, it does not resolve the crucial issues of transport, waste, and testing on and in the oceans.

Six more NWFZs have been established since then, with most of the world's terrestrial surface now covered by specific regional forms of nuclear governance. However, none has fully addressed the maritime gaps left by the NPT. Oceans are very ambiguously treated, even though early NWFZs were very expansive in range. The Treaty of Tlatelolco (1969), for example, applies to the Caribbean Sea as well as to substantial parts of the Southeast Pacific and the Southwest Atlantic. The Treaty of Rarotonga (1986) also refers to a vast maritime space in the South Pacific and even purposed to encompass the full Pacific Ocean area (Mogami, 1988). By contrast, later NWFZs did not establish the high seas surrounding their member states as nuclear weapons-free. The Treaty of Bangkok (1997) only includes the continental shelves of Southeast Asian states and the Treaty of Pelindaba (2009) is curbed even further by merely including the territorial waters of African states (Adeniji, 2002).

This overall trend of retracting from maritime spaces is chiefly related to the resistance exhibited by nuclear-weapons states (NWSs). Disputes have repeatedly emerged around the tension between a delineation that would forbid any state to deploy or hold nuclear weapons within maritime spaces surrounding the zone on one hand, and the freedom of the seas, which would prevent such restrictions for third parties to, for instance, pass through the zone with warships holding nuclear weapons on the other hand. NWSs have thus been confronted with potential restrictions imposed by regional agreements of which they are not part, and have worked over the years to steadily constrain the maritime extension of NWFZs, for instance by not signing treaty protocols drafted to that effect (Müller et al., 2016). In a geopolitical context fixated on territorial nation-states, it is not surprising that attempts by NWFZs to materialise as regionalisms with a maritime dimension have been subject to contention with respect to expanding their respective geographic areas beyond the original landmasses targeted by denuclearisation. The transit of nuclear weapons through territorial waters was bracketed from the Treaty of Tlatelolco, as not all Latin American states agreed on its importance (Rodríguez & Mendenhall, 2022). Even offshore territories explicitly included in the Pelindaba Treaty, like the Chagos Archipelago, have been argued to be exempted by NWSs (Sand, 2019). Likewise, the Treaty of Rarotonga has been limited by de facto only applying within the 12-mile territorial sea of its signatory parts, in particular excluding US trust territories (Mogami, 1988). To put it differently, maritime spaces have proven to be lightning rods of contention that impede the expected application of the NWFZ ethos.

On top of this multilevel supply of regional security governance in the shape of NWFZs, zones of peace provide yet another—though far less institutionalised—layer to achieve disarmament in more general terms within a geographic area. Maritime regions have also, on occasion, been central but contested elements of such zones of peace. This can be discerned in the understanding of those zones encompassing the “entire ocean space, from the subsoil of the seabed to the surface of the high seas. A zone of peace is a practice, in short, of disarmament along that entire space” (Lopez-Reyes, 1998, p. 401). However, they face the same difficulties as NWFZs associated with the geographical delimitation of maritime zones of peace (Subedi, 1998). Their implication for the principle of freedom of the seas, and the non-definition of the obligations that each state—both zonal and external—should uphold, have been recurrent counter-arguments to their effective application in the international context.

In sum, the non-proliferation regime and maritime regionalisms are intertwined in several ways. NWFZs stand as the primary legal and institutional regional manifestation of the NPT regime, while zones of peace pursue similar objects in a less institutionalised form.

They both reinforce each other’s norms and rules. The non-proliferation aspirations of NWFZs and zones of peace lead them to acquire traits of maritime regionalisms, thus setting them apart from the bulk of international governance mechanisms that marginalise maritime spaces. As such, they represent fitting cases to examine the conceptual and practical challenges to maritime security regionalism as well as the consequences of such institutionalisation processes. To assess how these entanglements manifest themselves in practice, we turn to our main empirical case. The South Atlantic exhibits a comparatively high density of regional security governance, with three NWFZs and one zone of peace reaching into this maritime space.

4. The Entanglements of the South Atlantic

Given the continuous institutional expansion of regionalism and multilateralism, most parts of the world are crowded by multiple, overlapping governance mechanisms (Engel et al., 2016). In that regard, the South Atlantic stands as no exception in the broader global canvas. Still, even though some single-purpose regional organisations, such as regional fisheries management organisations or the security-focused Gulf of Guinea Commission, may focus on maritime spaces for functional reasons, larger existing regional organisations on each shore have not been able to escape their land-based original focus. This applies to all major adjacent multi-purpose organisations. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) have lacked an explicit Atlantic purview since their respective foundations. Either a maritime strategy is absent altogether or it constitutes vague intentions with a low priority for implementation. But despite a prevalent terra-centrism, the South Atlantic also offers a recurrent functional thread based on non-proliferation concerns. In fact, the maritime dimension has been consistently used as a springboard to foment regional trust and promote further concertation in other security-related areas.

Previous attempts to bridge both sides of the South Atlantic during the height of the Cold War, or at least instil substantial regional security governance, failed to gain much traction due to bipolar frictions and political divisions. The stillborn case for a South Atlantic Treaty Organisation became paradigmatic in this regard (cf. Wall, 1977; see also Hurrell, 1983). Sufficient common ground was only found in terms of the implications that the existence of nuclear weapons *latu sensu* withheld for all countries alike. The Antarctica Treaty had set the standard internationally in this regard, particularly in terms of requiring binding commitments by the international community at large, and more importantly, by the NWSs, over what not to do in such an area. However, the

precedent of this treaty was not necessarily followed to the letter in subsequent experiments of the kind, with its main contribution residing in setting concrete geographic boundaries for Southern waters, which could then inspire more delimited neighbourly spaces.

This inspiration was put to good use by the second component of the South Atlantic equation, namely the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which focused specifically on Latin America and the Caribbean region. Signed on 14 February 1967, it emerged with a few specificities of its own. On the one hand, even though its dispositions covered the mainland, territorial sea and airspace of all Latin American and Caribbean signatory states, the treaty left many issues, such as peaceful nuclear explosions, rather ambiguous. On the other hand, it also foresaw an umbilical incorporation of its verification system into the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Meanwhile, a corresponding effort was explored on the opposite side of the ocean. The Treaty of Pelindaba, which created the African NWFZ, essentially stemmed from efforts undertaken by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), as a response to French nuclear testing in the Saharan desert in the 1960s (Mpofu-Walsh, 2022)—even though its signature only took place in 1996. Among other items, it prohibited the research, development, manufacture, stockpiling, acquisition, testing, possession, control, or stationing of nuclear explosive devices in the territory of member states as well as the dumping of radioactive wastes in Africa. In comparison, the three NWFZs evidence key differences over how to best support and enforce a shared non-proliferation ethos, but they also highlight considerable room for manoeuvre in terms of how to actually achieve such a goal and where to invest the bulk of official efforts.

However, amidst this ambivalent supply of multilateral governance solutions, one peculiar initiative manages to cross the South Atlantic spectrum while remaining shy of becoming a fully-fledged regional organisation. Indeed, the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS) has stood out over the years for donning the regional mantle of a specifically maritime-tailored forum, with a self-ascribed mandate over security issues, including non-proliferation. Created in 1986 by the UN General Assembly, ZOPACAS placed an early premium on formally declaring this particular maritime space free of nuclear weapons so as to transfer the onus of violating such dispositions onto the NWSs themselves. At the same time, it abhorred any verification measures of its own goals. The adoption of a “naming-and-shaming” strategy helped to mask its lack of institutionalisation as well as its reliance on the goodwill and resources of key regional players, namely Brazil, interested in pushing it to the forefront of international visibility (Abdenur et al., 2016). Regardless, non-proliferation remained the core leitmotiv that succeeded in bringing all parties to the table. A different question is whether or not it succeeded in its envisioned endgame for the South Atlantic.

4.1. Challenges to Regional Security Governance

Despite the abovementioned supply of regional structures in the South Atlantic, the odds of effective non-proliferation in the region did not automatically increase once each was set into place. This multifaceted ecosystem has faced a series of shared challenges that have prevented the effective accomplishment of their original designs, thus leading to questions over their actual contribution to fomenting cross-oceanic regional security governance.

The first challenge concerns a dispersion effect. Created at different moments throughout contemporary history, both the three NWFZs and ZOPACAS served a key instrumental purpose at the moment they were conceptualised and proposed to the rest of the region. While this would imply that they were particularly useful at each constitutive moment, it also meant all leading actors and participating countries within the South Atlantic were asked to continue supporting them in equal measure. The overlap invariably raises questions of how to prioritise the allocation of scarce resources and attention. It also diminished claims by any of the instruments to overall regional representation. Dynamics of forum shopping (Hofmann, 2019) are not evident in this context, as no initiative allowed non-proliferation to be undermined. Yet, overlapping mandates and fleeting references to each other, with no formal mechanisms in charge of bridging or bringing together the work of existing non-proliferation structures, have also kept them away from collaboration more often than not.

A second challenge concerned the fact that non-regional powers remained very much central to the governance of this region. Indeed, even though external countries with territories in Latin America and the Caribbean (France, the Netherlands, the UK, and the US) adhered to the additional protocols of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, most NWSs have also pointed out, through multiple interpretive statements issued afterwards, that they would not accept any kind of restrictions on their freedom at sea (Goldblat, 1997, p. 21). The UK even deployed warships with nuclear weapons in the South Atlantic during the Falklands War, even if it did not consider the factual undermining of non-proliferation to be a breach of this treaty, as they did not enter territorial waters (Norton-Taylor, 2022). This incident illustrates a tendency of NWSs to maintain a veneer of adherence to agreed non-proliferation treaties but to operate in secrecy in order to violate the spirit of such treaties in practice. Likewise, much of the original discussions over the geographic application of Pelindaba concerned only externally-controlled islands closer to the continent, most palpably in the case of the British Indian Ocean Territory. This meant that the inclusion of Atlantic islands, such as Ascension, Tristan da Cunha, or Bouvet, was never properly taken into account, thus leaving them outside of both treaties’ denuclearisation purview. The aftermath of these decisions led to a mutual recognition:

Aspirations of regionalizing in full the debate over the contours of Southern non-proliferation could not be achieved without the input, or at least tacit participation, of NWSs, especially those with overseas territories.

A third challenge concerns the general issue of verifiability. Despite recurrent public pledges, whether in the form of formal treaties such as the Tlatelolco and Pelindaba treaties or in the form of discursive rhetoric through ZOPACAS ministerial meetings, any intent to stop the transit of ships or aircraft carrying nuclear weapons in the region remained, for all intended purposes, unverifiable (Melocowsky, 2016). As a consequence, any intended wider maritime reach has been significantly curtailed from the start. This state of affairs became particularly evident in the case of ZOPACAS, as the lack of robust institutional structures to back its stated goals up quickly became a liability when faced with periods of disinvestment from its main sponsors and the corresponding inactivity that followed. Hence, an overreliance on informal commitments or legal dispositions difficult to attest made a dent in the South Atlantic's non-proliferation credentials as an effective regional driver on its own.

A fourth and last challenge regards resources. The fact that there is a measure of functional overlap between each of the existing mechanisms has equally exposed the extent of necessary means that are invariably required to accomplish every stated goal in this domain. For all intended purposes, the reliance on discursive strategies that seek to socially construct a maritime space of common interest only masks the limited capabilities available to South Atlantic countries to dedicate to regional governance mechanisms (Espach, 2019). In this regard, the limits of maritime regionalism are constantly brought into evidence whenever they fail to attract sufficient support and resources amidst the members that they are intended to serve in the first place.

4.2. Regional Achievements

For all the obstacles that have emerged along the way, a notion of maritime regionalism has endured nonetheless in the South Atlantic. That is chiefly owed to a number of small, yet significant achievements that made this particular case a testament to resilience in attempting to carve a regional community based on maritime traits.

First, even though verifiability remained weak and dependent on external input, progress has still been achieved through a degree of sizeable regional institutionalisation to ensure a credible verification system on each side of the Atlantic. For the Tlatelolco case, close cooperation with the IAEA led to the creation of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL), based in Mexico City, specifically created to ensure that treaty obligations were met. Likewise, the Treaty of Pelindaba led to the creation of the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCON), based in Pretoria, as the chief enforcer of legal dispositions.

Both developments have provided concrete steps underlining a shared South Atlantic non-proliferation core.

Second, the lack of additional institutionalisation that has been highlighted as a peculiarity of the region has not prevented South Atlantic routines and rituals to emerge. In the case of ZOPACAS, for instance, member states have tried to make up for the absence of headquarters by having their permanent representatives to the UN fulfil secretarial functions (Abdenur et al., 2018). Likewise, even though it lacks international legal stand as other traditional regional organisations or even as its neighbourly NWFZs, ZOPACAS still attracts regular support through consecutive UN General Assembly resolutions, in what has come to amount to a unique level of international validation. Despite their evident shortcomings, the recurrent practices established around ZOPACAS allow for social reproduction and correspond to what has been best defined as an informal organisation with a decentralised consensual structure (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013). Taken together, ZOPACAS and the NWFZs can reinforce the normative ground to delegitimise nuclear weapons in the South Atlantic and even at a global level.

Finally, the combination of a loose patchwork of NWFZs and zones of peace has unmistakably helped to foster a regional narrative that provides a semblance of collective, if fleeting unity in the face of regional threats. For all purposes, the NWFZs and ZOPACAS share a *modus operandi* that is mutually reinforcing in the sense that they all place a negative behavioural onus on outsiders. They all also partake in a common ethos given how "the opposition to nuclear weapons is very much part of the political identity of the southern hemisphere" (Dhanapala, 2011, p. 8). For most of the countries in the region, non-proliferation is part of how they project themselves into the international sphere and it constitutes a pillar of the global governance they seek to achieve. Shortly after its creation in 1963, the OAU adopted a resolution on the denuclearisation of Africa, tying it firmly with the rationale of decolonisation. By contrast, the civil use of nuclear energy has often been tied to the economic development and industrialisation ambitions of African countries, especially since the continent has an abundance of uranium but only a few nuclear development programmes. The strong normative commitment against nuclear weapons on the regional level is also reflected in the Treaty of Pelindaba, even if ten African countries have not ratified it. However, the lack of ratification is less a contestation of the non-proliferation norm than a reflection of domestic governance failures, or a perception of low urgency (Van Wyk & Turianskyi, 2021). On the Latin American side of the Atlantic, Argentina and Brazil jointly adopted a non-proliferation normative in the early 1990s. This marked a drastic change after having pursued nuclear programmes and consolidated the Treaty of Tlatelolco (Simpson & Howlett, 1995). Non-proliferation was, in this context, not just an end in itself but also a part of a broader rapprochement between the two

countries, who surpassed their previous rivalries while they both transitioned to democracy and embarked on a joint economic integration project (Carasales, 1995; Mattheis, 2010). In that sense, South Atlantic countries from both shores can claim to have succeeded in self-constructing and promoting an idea of a region based on normative convergence and thematic specificity, even if denuclearisation has not been fully substantiated or accomplished in practice. While this might not outlaw norm-breaking to non-proliferation, it does facilitate the notion of an emerging regional maritime governance architecture (de Buitrago & Schneider, 2020).

4.3. Unintended Consequences

Regardless of some successes in ensuring the South Atlantic remained a minor concern amidst the broader non-proliferation agenda, this odd mix of regional governance mechanisms also generated additional outcomes, that were not intended or anticipated in their original mandates or goals (Burlyuk, 2017). Unintended consequences can be conceptualised as a set of effects that does not correspond to the intended objectives of the originating action (Lopez-Lucia & Mattheis, 2020). In the case of South Atlantic non-proliferation, we can discern two such sets: The first is an effect on the broader regional system and the second is an effect on the actors carrying out the action.

First, delineating the South Atlantic as a region created new constellations of leadership. It quickly became evident that the provision of regional non-proliferation can easily be co-opted as means to ulterior ends, more specifically by the regional power ambitions in key countries. In particular, Brazil and South Africa found fertile ground in the flexibility of NWFZs and zones of peace to stake claims of even more increased prominence, hoping to enlist further supporters for their own views of what the South Atlantic should be and how it should be organised. In turn, this created divisions that would have gone unnoticed in a non-maritime delineation—particularly in terms of how to best put regional governance into place, with Brazil pushing for a more sovereigntist view, backed by a security-centric rationale, while South Africa advocates for the governance of oceans as global commons (Duarte & Kenkel, 2019). In other words, closer association of key regional players around common objectives has created new rifts regarding the implementation of each of the multilateral solutions present in the region. Meanwhile, other states in the region, in particular smaller countries, have been supportive of being included in formal initiatives, as it strengthens their agency in non-proliferation issues but also in global affairs more generally.

Second, an original design centred on non-proliferation has not excluded other geopolitical topics from crossing the threshold of regional debate, under the framework of these different regional mechanisms. The case of Argentina and the Falklands/Malvinas has

proven a stark example, with the issue being consistently placed front and centre in any multilateral attempt to discuss and construct the South Atlantic as a maritime space of its own. Likewise, during the policy impetus evidenced between 2006 and 2016, Brazil saw fit to use the justification of ZOPACAS as a potential counterweight to NATO's intent to look South (Edwards & de Carvalho, 2020). A premium on non-proliferation has therefore not inoculated a maritime region from potentially tackling other associated topics of interest, even though it remains far from clear if those topics have proven more successful in holding the region together or if they have been, in fact, the ones responsible for keeping it apart.

5. Conclusion

Maritime regionalisms display a more difficult path in manifesting themselves as fully-fledged composites of state-level units, when in comparison with terra-centric endeavours. Nevertheless, this does not mean their emergence is stalled or precluded from the offset. Regional maritime security governance can be conducive to advancing collaboration, not only by expanding the reach of pre-existing continental regionalisms but also by addressing blind spots, such as the issue of maritime non-proliferation.

The experience evidenced by the South Atlantic in terms of multi-level mechanisms grounded by a shared non-proliferation agenda points to four elements that warrant more careful observation both for scholars and policy-makers. These elements are not limited to the South Atlantic and also point to comparative possibilities with other maritime spaces, especially where nuclear proliferation is on the rise, such as the Indo-Pacific or the Arctic Sea. First, regional maritime security arrangements do not only depend on support by member states, they also require at least tacit agreement by all seafaring parties. Second, regional maritime security arrangements require disinvestment or rescinding sovereignty by great powers and former colonial powers with overseas territories. Third, thematic overreach beyond the original focus can present challenges and opportunities on equal measure, and benefits from an existing degree of institutionalisation. Last, more regional security governance structures encompassing the same region do not necessarily translate into a more cohesive regional space. They can, however, complement one another and reinforce their respective mandates despite a predisposition for competition over resources and mandates.

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The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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