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**José Antonio Sanahuja<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universidad Complutense de Madrid -  
Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociología,  
Madrid, Spain ([sanahuja@cps.ucm.es](mailto:sanahuja@cps.ucm.es))



ORCID ID:  
[orcid.org/0000-0002-6806-5498](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6806-5498)

**Francisco Javier**

**Verdes-Montenegro Escáñez<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>Instituto Complutense de Estudios  
Internacionales (ICEI) - Relaciones  
Internacionales, Gobernanza Global  
y Cooperación, Madrid, Spain  
([fjverdes-montenegro@ucm.es](mailto:fjverdes-montenegro@ucm.es))



ORCID ID:  
[orcid.org/0000-0002-3521-0273](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3521-0273)

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# The Copenhagen School in South America: the (de)securitization of UNASUR (2008-2017)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the most significant processes of securitization and desecuritization occurring at the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) from its inception in 2008 until 2017, when UNASUR began to experience a gridlock. The analysis begins with the hypotheses of desecuritization of armed conflict among the South American countries, as well as their approach to problems drug-related. To this end, the paper is based on a critical theory of security with focus on securitization, and offers an expanded and/or discursive conception of security that goes beyond the military dimension.

**Keywords:** Copenhagen School; South America; securitization; UNASUR; Regional Security Complex Theory.

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## Introduction

The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) has been among the most far-reaching organizations in terms of regional cooperation, as compared to other Latin American initiatives that have acted in parallel, including the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America / Trade Agreement of the Peoples (ALBA-TCP), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Pacific Alliance, or the Forum for Progress in South America (PROSUR) – the latter having been established in 2019 by a group of ideologically aligned governments to replace UNASUR.

Unrealized proposals of the late 1990s to create a South American free trade area, and the immediate precedent of the Community of South American States in the early 2000s were the background for UNASUR, a regional organization established in

2008 as a multidimensional body for regional dialogue and consultation, and sectoral cooperation bringing together the twelve sovereign countries of South America: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Due to its particular characteristics and areas of action, UNASUR became one of the clearest expressions of a certain modality of regionalism that emerged in Latin America in the 2000s, defined as “post-liberal” (Veiga and Ríos 2007; Sanahuja 2009) or “post-hegemonic” (Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012).

Unlike previous experiences in ‘open regionalism,’ UNASUR brought a novel emphasis on cooperation in security and defense, adding interest to the analysis of its development, especially in light of a hypothesis advanced by some experts around the intensification of regional security dynamics in a post-Cold War context (Buzan and Wæver 2003). In addition, among the different dimensions of cooperation addressed by UNASUR — energy, infrastructure, health, etc. —, security and defense cooperation have shown the most progress.

From a theoretical perspective, studies on security in recent decades have given rise to profound debates around the concept of ‘security’ itself, at a time when concepts weighted by substantial ontological and epistemological differences have proliferated. The notion of security adopted here is discursive and interpretive, making use of the analytical-conceptual tools provided by the Copenhagen School through the theory of securitization presented in the seminal work *Security: a New Framework for Analysis* (1998). Linking the concepts of security and regionalism, a later work from this same school, *Regions & Power* (2003), sought to advance this area by providing a theoretical-methodological framework for the analysis of dynamics and structures in regional security. This framework is known as the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT).

Based on these works, and given the development of ‘post-liberal’ regionalism as a mechanism for cooperation in security and defense, the processes of securitization and desecuritization that have occurred around UNASUR within the South American security complex are worthy of examination. The elements and variables that can explain these processes include: the numerous securitizing actors and audiences, as well as the objects of reference; the manner in which securitization has been pursued; how threats have been defined; and the results obtained. Early in the new century, Buzan and Wæver (2003) raised the need for “micro” studies on the securitization dynamics that fit their particular cartography of regional security complexes (which South America may be said to represent, in and of itself). In such a context, the theory of securitization has proven a valid tool for the analysis of regional dynamics, as a meta-theory of the RSCT but with greater explanatory capacity.

In response to Buzan and Wæver’s call, this work provides a detailed study on cooperation in defense and security — from a regional body, until now not adequately addressed by the theory of securitization (Sperling and Webber 2018). Moreover, our analysis is carried out from the discursive conception of security provided by that theoretical approach, without the self-limitation of addressing these issues in isolation. This broadened and discursive conception of security allows us to examine security and defense cooperation in a comprehensive way, through a reflexive examination of threats and their social construction, taking into account their internal and external

dimensions as well as the transnational dynamics that link them and make them problematic. Finally, as an infra-theorized issue that has received scant attention from the securitization approach, the dynamics of desecuritization that have operated at UNASUR are analyzed (Neumann 2012). With these aims and theoretical assumptions, the analysis seeks to fill a clear void in the already large body of literature on UNASUR.

To undertake these issues, the article begins by reviewing how the study of regional security dynamics in South America has been approached through the prism of securitization and the RSCT; next, we analyze the securitization and desecuritization logics that have been carried out at UNASUR. The hypotheses of conflict will be tackled via the South American Defense Council (SDC), in order to then address their logic in the case of the responses to the problems of drugs and citizen security.

As Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde (1998) pointed out, if one begins from the discursive conception of security provided by the theory of securitization, discourse analysis will be the main methodological tool, and such work has been applied here to both primary and secondary sources. The scale of spatial analysis adopted is regional, specifically for the case of South America and its institutional reflection as UNASUR, which in the period under study integrated the twelve South American countries. This choice also fits the original approach of Buzan and Wæver (2003) in their RSCT, which identifies a regional security complex in South America. This analysis covers a period of nearly a decade, from the creation of the SDC, in December of 2008, until 10 April 2017 – the date of the latest act giving an account of that body's work. Most of the literature on UNASUR examines only its initial stages; this contribution looks at a longer period to provide a more complete vision of UNASUR's trajectory, from its early development to the lethargy observed from 2015 onwards.

## Regionalism and security: a discursive approach from “micro” studies

The study of regionalism faces the double challenge of providing an integrated comparative method that also overcomes the problem of Eurocentrism (Söderbaum 2013). Some contributions aim to achieve greater synergy among the different contributions around regional studies, as well as to achieve common conceptual and methodological tools in order to strengthen comparative studies. Other works on Latin American regionalism have emphasized the new phase experienced in the region, its distinctive character, and the specificity of the context in which it was framed, calling it “post-liberal” (Veiga and Ríos 2007; Sanahuja 2012), or “post-hegemonic” (Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012).

Assuming the multidimensional nature of these new manifestations of regionalism, a good number of works deepen the study of sectoral cooperation, highlighting especially those that focus on South America. Such works include, among others, those by Pia Riggirozzi (2015) in the field of health; by Daniela Perrotta (2014) regarding the dimensions of science and technology

and education; by Nicolás Comini (2015), Alejandro Frenkel (2016), and Tamires Souza (2019) in matters of security and defense; and by Stéfano Palestini and Giovanni Agostinis (2018) for infrastructure and energy.

## A theory for the study of regional security in a comparative way, avoiding Eurocentrism: the RSCT

Until the contributions of Barry Buzan, regional dynamics in security studies were addressed only theoretically, through diffuse notions such as “subsystem” or “regional power balance,” or else they were limited to case studies without a clear definition of “the regional” in terms of its ontology or its epistemological assumptions. This author’s collaboration with Ole Wæver at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (hence our mention of the Copenhagen School) contributed to redefining his vision of these regional dynamics as well as the very concept of security.

In *Peoples, States and Fear* (1983), Buzan laid the foundations of his theoretical-methodological proposal for the analysis of regional security dynamics, developing the concept of a “Security Complex” to analyze the intermediate level between States and individuals. One of the objectives of this approach was to address the autonomy of regional security relations, neglected by the dominant theories of the moment and mainly focused on the systemic level, or on interstate relations (Buzan 1983).

At the same time, through the notion of Security Complexes, Buzan aspired to break from specialization by area and to facilitate comparative studies among distinct regional specialists by providing a shared language and concepts (Buzan 2003). After this first approach in the 1980s, Buzan continued, throughout the 1990s, to examine the tension and interrelationships between distinct levels of analysis; in the early 2000s he developed a more refined, expanded, and updated theorization of Security Complexes, now featuring the contributions of Ole Wæver. Both these authors had collaborated five years earlier with Jaap de Wilde on *Security: a New Framework for Analysis* to launch the theory of securitization. Moreover, as the authors explained in the prologue, its initial claim was to update the RSCT, although the analytical framework of securitization was forged in the end (Buzan *et al.* 1998). While in that prior work they presented their theory of securitization and dealt with the dimensions (sectors) of security, in their updated work, entitled *Regions & Power* (2003), Buzan and Wæver brought attention to the levels of analysis and unveiled another great contribution of the Copenhagen School: the Regional Security Complexes Theory.

RSCT starts from the importance of territoriality and the regional level in approaching the dynamics of international security. This became more prominent in the post-Cold War period, which put an end to a regionalism subjected to the logic of two hegemonic powers, although such change had already begun with the decolonization process. As the exponents of this theory themselves state: “the logic linking these assumptions was that processes of securitization would be strongly influenced by the fact that most types of threat travel more easily over short distances than long ones” (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Thus, Security Complexes are promoted as the most relevant structures for a given level of analysis, although their definition and certain assumptions (such as the relationships among states and between levels) varied from *Peoples, States and Fear* to *Regions & Power*. These changes, as Buzan (2003) acknowledged, are intended to set aside state-centric assumptions and to take into account the “linguistic turn” affecting the discipline through social-constructivist theory and other reflectivist currents.

In an earlier version, the Security Complex was understood as “a set of States whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved without one another” (Buzan 1983, 105-106). However, a subsequent definition of Security Complexes refers to the “set of units whose main securitization and desecuritization processes are so interrelated that their security problems cannot be differentiated” (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 491).

With this theory, further developed and revised in *Regions & Power*, Buzan and Wæver link securitization processes with the study and mapping of security levels in order to understand the security structure and to enable a framework for empirical studies on regional security. Thus, the RSCT approach is a hybrid of the neo-realism predominant in the 1980s and the English School of international society, to which Buzan contributed, along with social-constructivist approaches that echo the notion of the “speech-act” introduced by Wæver at the end of that decade, and that both authors integrate into the theory of securitization.

However, as Buzan and Wæver acknowledged, *Regions & Power* could not deepen the analysis of securitization processes by covering all regions as well as their respective international security dynamics. Moreover, securitization is present in the work as a meta-theoretical principle and, therefore, as an epistemology that guides the way in which ‘security’ is viewed and spoken of, in addition to being the theoretical approach used in certain case studies where a security issue is crucial and needs to be understood in depth (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 488). With the RSCT, Buzan and Wæver proposed a macro-analysis that, according to them, was to be completed with “micro” studies with further examination of specific Regional Security Complexes that define the perimeter of certain securitization processes.

What about the RSCT in the South American security complex? In *Regions & Power*, Buzan and Wæver present as the most significant trend the fact that the South American security complex is composed of two sub-complexes, the Southern Cone and the Andean region, increasingly differentiated but connected within a standard security complex. In addition to relations with the United States, the importance of MERCOSUR is highlighted, not only for its advances in economic matters, but also for its influence on that group’s political and security reconfigurations. In this way, the narrative that justifies and is echoed in this integration project contains two aspects: the defense of democracy, and the need to integrate economies, so as not to be isolated from increasingly internationalized and globalized economic flows.

In turn, Buzan and Wæver take into account two other discourses associated with MERCOSUR, with a security logic: “In one part, it avoids conflict and defends the invaluable

gain in local stability that an improved Argentine-Brazilian relationship creates. And in the other part it creates an interregional and global security argument for South America: only with a desecuritized relationship between Argentina and Brazil and a credible MERCOSUR can they (and not least Brazil) act vis-à-vis others (read: the United States) with the power of a region” (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 327).

Since the RSCT was first coined by Buzan and Wæver, a paradoxical trend has been observed: while works on regional security in Latin America have proliferated, very few contributions have deepened the analysis of South American regional security dynamics with a comparative view and through this theoretical approach. Of the few that have done so, the contributions of Arlene B. Tickner (2004, 2015), Andrea Oelsner (2009), Augusto Wagner Menezes Teixeira (2013), Alexandre Fuccille and Lucas Rezende Pereira (2013), Ana Patrícia Neves Abdul-Hak (2013), Marina Vitelli (2017) and Tamires Souza (2019) are noteworthy. Their contributions obviate the theory of securitization or are limited to the case of the SDC, in most cases from the perspective of Brazil.

### A more social-constructivist, less neorealist RSCT to advance comparative analyses of regional security

In 2003, the same year that *Regions & Power* was published, Raimo Väyrynen pointed out that theories were required that could provide a spatial context to security theories, since the traditional currents of Security Studies did not seem very helpful when approaching the analysis of regions or regionalism. Neither neorealism nor neoliberal institutionalism have the spatial dimension for relevant analysis, and only in offensive realism are the fundamental geopolitical issues addressed through their emphasis on competition among “great powers,” but with “rationalist” and state-centric assumptions. In the calculation of transaction costs, these approaches fail to quantify the externalities (political instability, illegal migration, etc.) that can become internalized by being part of a collective regional scheme, ignoring the provision of regional public goods and responses to regional public ills (Väyrynen 2003).

In that sense, the RSCT is a theoretical-methodological framework whose claims are in a broad sense consistent with the current challenges faced by the study of regionalism, such as the comparative perspective, its non state-centric nor Eurocentric character, and the assumption of transnational interdependencies. However, although the theory of securitization has been applied to different case studies and has generated an intense and enriching debate, there has been little development of the RSCT despite the fact that the post-Cold War context widened the margins for regional security dynamics, and because of the financial crisis of 2008 did not affect this area (Wæver 2011). Therefore, it is worth asking whether the RSCT itself might not suffer from certain weaknesses that hinder its application.

As to this question, we may recall Hentz’s (2003) warning about the Copenhagen School, alleging that its almost neorealist approach to the idea of a security complex represents

a misstep. Although the RSCT tries to go further, it remains state-centric. Nor should the following statement by Guzzini be overlooked: “Securitization theory should be used as a way to understand the national and regional specificities of discursive processes of political legitimation, to compare them and/or bring them together for the understanding of regional security dynamics” (Guzzini 2015).

Taking these jointly into account, the possibility arises of a RSCT that is detached from neorealist limitations and focused on taking greater advantage of the theory of securitization on which it rests – a theory that has experienced broad and deep development over the last decades. In the first instance, this would imply a radically different epistemological approach. From its origin, the RSCT assumed realistic and rationalist assumptions around the “given” nature of social reality, the reification of the State and its own interest in these approaches, and the geopolitical determinations of regional realities as geographical fact. Subsequently, the socially constructed nature of these ontologies is assumed, along with the intersubjective nature of regional reality, threats, and security.

This would imply paying less attention to the type and polarity of CSR structures, turning away from a reflexive and interpretive perspective, and toward the discourses and security practices generated in each of the regional security complexes. Only from previous works on each of the complexes can a broader vision be developed that encompasses all of them, with agreement over a series of shared concepts that would promote working from a comparative (not Eurocentric or state-centric) perspective.

What is indicated in the end is that Buzan and Wæver put the cart in front of the oxen, proposing a theoretical-methodological approach to the study of regions imbued with a neorealist vision that reduces the potential of their theory of securitization, thus conditioning the results that can be obtained from in-depth analysis of regional security dynamics through that theoretical approach. This proposal also converges with a collective securitization agenda that has evolved since 2016, addressing securitization in the establishment of formal institutions, such as security alliances or regional organizations (Sperling and Webber 2018).

## The (de)securitization of UNASUR (2008-2017)

In this section we examine the various processes of securitization and desecuritization observed at UNASUR over the ten years of the SDC (2008-2017). Specifically, we explain how the hypotheses of conflict between South American countries and the region’s drugs-related activities have been desecuritized, taking into account pertinent organizations and the different sector councils involved (common and permanent): the SDC (CDS by its acronym in Spanish), the South American Council on the World Drug Problem (CSPMD), and the South American Council of Citizen Security, Justice and Transnational Organized Crime (CSDOT).

## SDC: the desecuritization of hypotheses of conflict

The first issues addressed by the SDC involved its own institutionalization, as well as the mobilization of resources that would allow it to function properly, which included the elaboration of the Statute of the Council and its regulations. Within that framework, four axes of cooperation were defined through respective action plans: (i) defense policies; (ii) military cooperation, humanitarian actions, and peacekeeping operations; (iii) defense industry and technology; and (iv) education and training (SDC 2009; 2010-2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017). In each of them, a series of proposed activities aspired to serve as “feasible initiatives to be carried out in the short and medium terms” (UNASUR 2009). Taken together, these axes fostered 156 cooperation activities, planned over eight years, not all of which were brought to fruition or required the same capacities and resources. Until 2015, the level of implementation of these activities was quite high, at 92% in 2013 and 80% in 2014. After that, levels began to decrease, as did the general activity of UNASUR.

However, these action plans were not mere technical documents to establish tasks, activities, or responsibilities. They also represented an exercise in discursive construction of the identity, interests, and narratives of South American regionality, as well as of norms and institutions, such as with the deliberate processes of constructing a “South American defense identity,” a “South American Zone of Peace,” a catalog of shared threats to security, and common related guidelines.

In the 2009-2017 period, the first axis (defense policies) grouped together heterogeneous activities, including seminars and studies aimed at generating common strategic reflection and jointly identifying common threats to South American countries, also introducing a gender perspective into the field of defense. These tasks were entrusted to the Center for Strategic Studies for Defense (CEED), launched in 2011 and headquartered in Buenos Aires. Similarly, in line with the tradition of cooperative security instituted in the previous decade, this axis gave continuity to the application of mutual trust measures (MCMs), already established, while developing other vehicles, such as the South American Military Inventory Form (FOSIM) and the South American Registry of Military Inventories (RESIM).

With respect to CEED, as shown in Annex I, of the twelve South American countries, eleven kept at least one national delegate either full-time or part-time at the CEED headquarters (Guyana being the exception, due to lower national capacities). Although Suriname and Bolivia have both maintained an irregular presence at the center, the most prominent absence — given its greater capacities — has been that of Colombia, with the second largest defense budget in the region but with no delegate assigned to CEED since 2013. Along with Guyana, Colombia has also been the only country that has not designated its national counterpart center.

As the management at CEED has noted on numerous occasions, the maintenance of a permanent staff at the center by all twelve countries — dedicated full-time and with required capacities in the field of analysis — is a fundamental requirement if this body is to fulfill the

functions entrusted to it by the member states. In addition to Colombia's absence since 2013, other activities have fueled suspicion by some UNASUR partners, as expressed in interviews with national delegates (Verdes-Montenegro 2018). Among these we can highlight: (i) the request for a cooperation program between Colombia and NATO; (ii) the creation, with U.S. support, of a Regional Center for Strategic Security Studies (CREES); (iii) the suggestion by the Colombian Defense Minister to mount a defense forum within the Pacific Alliance.

As pointed out above, these developments have fueled the distrust of other partners, which reflected in the interviews, and although Colombia claims that its situation has been misunderstood, it has at the same time justified perceptions that it represents a "pivot country" or a "Trojan Horse" of the U.S. in the region. This has weakened the discursive construction of a South American defense identity, given Colombia's openly Atlanticist position in practice and in discourse.

Regarding the second cooperation axis, since the launch of the SDC, 36 activities have been programmed for "military cooperation, humanitarian actions, and peacekeeping operations." As in the first axis, a portion of these activities has focused on the generation and socialization of South American discourses, identity, and norms, around four lines of work: (i) conferences and courses for the exchange of experiences on peacekeeping operations and humanitarian demining, (ii) the development of an inventory of defense capabilities and their potential improvement, using resources available to South American countries to support humanitarian actions; (iii) combined exercises at the regional level on peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid, aimed at promoting inter-operability; and (iv) the mapping of disaster risks.

Cooperation in defense industries and technologies is the third axis considered in the SDC action plans. Among the implemented activities, it is worth mentioning the development of an initial diagnosis on already existing industries and technologies in the region, to be kept up-to-date through an integrated information and cataloging system. Likewise, a calendar was prepared containing the various fairs, seminars, and events on this subject, while a South American seminar on basic industrial security and defense technology was promoted to encourage cooperation and the exchange of experiences.

Two activities have sparked the most interest: the design, development, and manufacture of two prototypes resulting from South American cooperation, *i.e.*, the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (VANT), headed by Brazil, and the Basic Training Aircraft (EPB) 'UNASUR I,' led by Argentina and its Brigadier General San Martín Aircraft Factory (FAdeA). Since 2012, certain technical specifications were advanced, but both actions abandoned the SDC action plan to form two Working Groups (WG) for long-term investment. If the start-up of either of these prototypes had been achieved, it would represent an unprecedented development in South American cooperation that could result in the first instance of regional (non-bilateral) military equipment.

The fourth and final axis of the SDC, corresponding to "education and training," launched 37 activities to promote training activities for civilian and military personnel in South America. Among these actions were three courses already consolidated in the SDC: an advanced course for

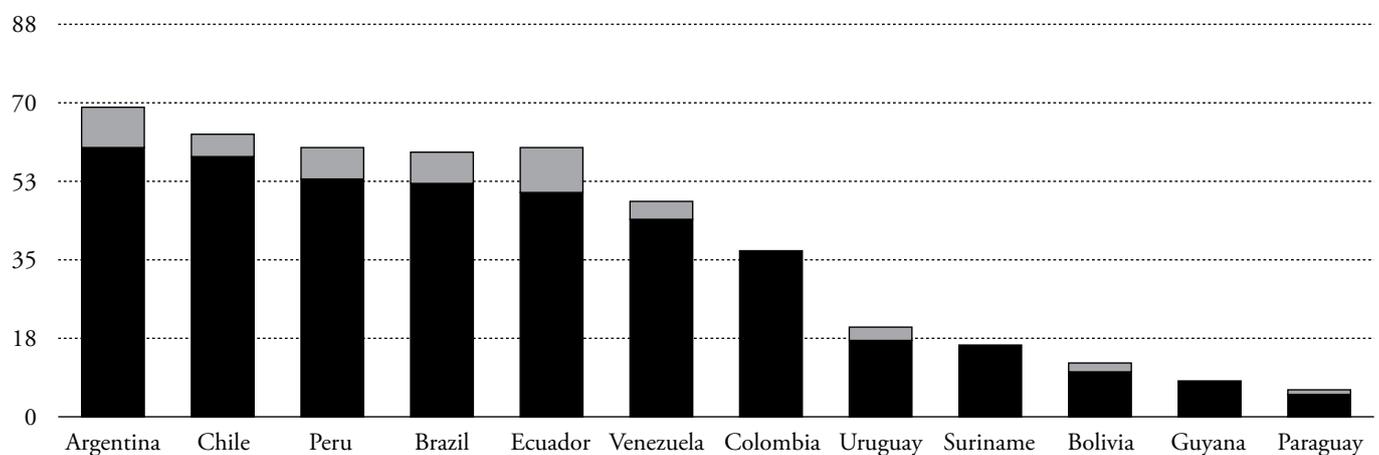
senior officials (CADSUL) that has been offered six times at the Brazilian War College; the South American Civilian Defense Training Program, with editions since 2012; and the South American course on International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, with four editions.

Most of the activities in this fourth axis of cooperation have been transferred to the South American School of Defense (ESUDE). As a result of the circumstances in which this South American entity took shape, the resources endowed to it and its guiding mission were given lower priority than initially proposed, and this was reflected in a lighter and more decentralized institutional design (Frenkel 2016). In that sense, ESUDE was limited to a framework for coordination among partner-centers, with a website and a distance-learning platform without sufficient means to deploy a real process of socialization for the region’s military cadres, nor to conform a regional defense identity or a common doctrine, although it has succeeded in building trust among countries.

Thus, as reflected in Figure 1 which shows the distribution of “responsible” and “co-responsible” actors in the whole of SDC activities during the period 2008-2017, the involvement of the various States is related to their international/regional scale and projection, their institutional capacities, and their agency to become involved in regional cooperation as operated through the SDC. In general, these data reveal a considerable level of ownership and sense of belonging, and a relatively balanced assumption of responsibilities, at least until 2015, under a cooperative security logic that broadens and “South Americanizes” elements already established in the 1990s through MERCOSUR.

In this regard, and as Figure 1 illustrates, a fracture exists between the group of seven countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela) that have been the propellers of cooperation, and the group of five countries that have assumed few responsibilities (Bolivia, Guyana, Paraguay, Suriname, and Uruguay).

**Figure 1. Distribution of responsibility in SDC activities, in action plans (black) and working groups (grey), by country (2009-2017)**



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on the SDC Action Plans (2009-2017).

From the first group of countries, we observe how the distribution of responsibilities was much more balanced. The only outlier appears to be the involvement of Argentina, which has hosted the CEED headquarters in Buenos Aires and boosted its activity, but which has also been the most active country in the SDC, with the most activities assumed since 2009. On the other hand, the lower degree of involvement by Colombia according to its weight and capabilities (Annex II), together with other facts mentioned above, has fueled distrust among some of its partners at UNASUR.

In any case, the relative balance observed in the appropriation of the SDC is significant, given the political and ideological fractures that exist in South America, and the resulting alignments, whether with the ‘more liberal’ Pacific Alliance or the ‘more Bolivarian’ ALBA-TCP. In some areas of security and defense cooperation, such as around regional infrastructure (Palestini and Agostinis 2018), these alignments have not proved an insurmountable obstacle — as they may be, for example, in terms of economic integration. Far from the hypothesis advanced by Buzan and Wæver, it appears that the two South American security subcomplexes did not increase their fragmentation over the period; rather, it might well be affirmed that UNASUR (through the SDC) integrated the countries progressively. The patterns of friendship and trust that began to consolidate through MERCOSUR were indeed extended to the South American region as a whole, embracing the Andean zone as well as Guyana and Suriname, previously isolated from their neighbors.

### The drug problem and citizen security with a South American scope

According to the organizational charter adopted by UNASUR in terms of security and defense, drug trafficking — later called the “world drug problem” — and public safety were to be addressed through the launch of two sector councils separate from the SDC (CSPMD and CSDOT by its acronym in Spanish). This separation of spheres was supported by South American countries such as Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Ecuador, against other countries that — due to both internal and external conditions — preferred to unite the categories, as in the case of Colombia, essentially due to its relationship with the United States.

This tension, described in other works as “differentiation vs. diffusion” has had important implications for the role played by the Armed Forces and their scope of action, in a context of “missionary crisis” for these military bodies instituted at the end of the Cold War, concurrent with the processes of democratization experienced in the region. In the clear differentiation of public safety and drug issues from defense, the scope of the Armed Forces was limited to responses to external threats that were seen as dangerous to territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Moreover, at least in theory, the division into spheres changed the ways in which the Armed Forces may respond to internal and/or transnational threats (Sanahuja and Verdes-Montenegro 2014).

The Westphalian framework of international politics, as well as a political culture in South America that (for historical and political reasons) remains very protective of the principles of

sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, insist that issues related to public security be maintained within the national sphere, thus hindering any conceptualization of security that recognizes the transnational and cross-border nature of threats. This classic vision of sovereignty makes it difficult to address such issues through the CSPMD or CSDOT or to formulate transnational responses (Ferreira 2017).

A need to clarify the links between the two sector councils — CSDOT and CSPMD — was therefore indicated, and an evaluation report was requested from the General Secretariat to help guide the articulation of their operations. From that report, and from another undertaken by CEED, it was established that the two sectoral councils would respond to differentiated questions, and that UNASUR itself should focus on prevention and effective response to problems. This differentiation was justified by the existence of likewise differentiated international regimes in the multilateral sphere, with the world drug problem on one hand and transnational organized crime on another. While there has been discussion of differentiated institutions that would imply the recognition of the functional and thematic autonomy of each, necessary overlaps have been recognized in certain specific objectives, to be identified in order to avoid duplication (UNASUR 2014, 7).

Within the *de facto* development and institutionalization experienced at the CSPMD in its more than seven years of operation, and apart from one action plan that failed to attain continuity, and another that was never approved, three main inputs have arisen during the various meetings: (i) to clarify the organism's role with respect to CSDOT, and their subsequent coordination; (ii) to launch a South American drug observatory; and (iii) to agree on a regional position before the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGASS) that took place in April 2016.

On the other hand, in line with the requirements of the Constitutive Treaty, the statute and action plan of the CSDOT were approved for a period of five years (2013-2017). Discussion of the CSDOT statute was based on proposals by Colombia and Argentina, and the action plan contained three main axes: (i) citizen security; (ii) justice; and (iii) coordination of actions against transnational organized crime divided into eleven thematic axes, 30 “strategic challenges,” and 137 actions to be implemented. Beyond the apparent ambition of this plan, it is notable that (unlike the SDC action plans) its term of validity was five years, and not annual.

The progress made by this council in its first five years of operation proved inferior to those of other sector councils, such as the SDC or the South American Council for Infrastructure and Planning (COSIPLAN), although it carried out numerous actions including seminars and reports at the regional level and exchanges of experiences. During the Venezuelan *pro tempore* presidency in 2016, a recapitulation was made of pending activities of the CSDOT and its level of compliance up to that time. As shown in Table 1, one year after the end of the validity of the Action Plan, 76 activities remained to be implemented, and the level of achieved compliance barely exceeded 36%.

**Table 1. Summary, numbers of CSDOT activities and their levels of compliance, by axis (2016)**

Axis	Activities	Realized	% compliance
Citizen Security	31	9	29%
Justice	18	9	50%
Transnational Organized Crime	27	9	33%
Total	76	27	36%

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on CSDOT (2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

In addition to these ideational and discursive elements, one factor endogenous to UNASUR that slows the deepening of cooperation around public security is diversity, which leads to diverging visions on citizen security among the twelve South American countries (Saint-Pierre and Lopes 2013). In the SDC, that diversity was channeled through CEED, but in the case of public security, divergences are more acute, and the establishment of a common approach has proved less feasible since the failure of a proposal by Peru to set up a Center for Strategic Studies against Transnational Organized Crime (CEECCOT).

This lack of interest in seeking citizen security agreements clearly reflects a similar attitude by member countries, none of which, apart from Argentina, excelled in regional security cooperation, despite having the capacity or means. Argentina had at this time a state policy strongly marked by the separation between external defense and internal citizen security.

Thus, the CSDOT and CSPMD were among the least active sector councils during the 2010-2017 period, lagging far behind the SDC, which was perceived as the ‘exemplary’ sector council. This relatively poor performance had less to do with their recent creation or the absence of permanent structures than with the multidimensional nature of the phenomena addressed by both councils — drugs, transnational organized crime and public safety —, the heterogeneity of relevant visions among the countries —more severe than in the field of defense—, and especially the institutions at play (Defense, Interior, Justice, etc.) which, depending on the country, can thwart contact among counterparts. Furthermore, in the case of CSDOT, it has not helped that Colombia, which showed the greatest initial interest, lost that impetus and was not relieved of its leadership or accompanied by any South American partners beyond Argentina.

As for the CSPMD, progress has been poor both in terms of the implementation of the Drug Observatory and in the missed window of opportunity represented by the 2016 UNGASS summit. Moreover, the council changed its name during the process of institutionalization. Following the Palanquero crisis,<sup>1</sup> in which UNASUR interceded, the creation of the South American Council to Combat Drug Trafficking was approved; however, in a very striking discursive turn, it was rebranded the South American Council on the World Drug Problem in the organism’s own statute.

<sup>1</sup> This crisis took place in 2009, following a cooperation agreement between Colombia and the United States to allow U.S. military presence through bases situated in Colombian territory, including Palanquero. This measure caused discomfort and distrust among most of Colombia’s South American partners, with the exception of Peru.

This self-imposed redesignation occurred in the context of a region-wide debate over modifying the international drug-control regime and the prevailing prohibitionist view.

Seen from a securitization approach, and taking into account the regional background, it may be said that South American countries have sought desecuritization of the drug problem while trying to displace the current inter-American system in this area, to avoid further interference by the United States through that umbrella. By institutionalizing a sector council on the global drug problem, the intention was to differentiate a regional vision from that championed by the U.S. However, both the CSPMD and CSDOT have operated as defensive spaces and may well remain so, due to a lack of continuity or of development beyond the holding of isolated seminars, or the timely exchange of good practices among UNASUR members.

In any case, the articulation of the South American sector councils on problems related to drugs and citizen security shows an interest in decoupling the former from other aspects that might be securitized, as well as in separating the sphere of defense against external threats from the internal security of citizens. This organizational scheme by UNASUR fits the “differentiation” approach adopted by Argentina, among others, which could explain, to a large extent, the country’s greater presence and activity in these matters.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have sought to answer our stated objective: the identification of securitization and desecuritization processes at UNASUR, as a way to review, deepen, and update an analysis of the South American security complex carried out by Buzan and Wæver (2003), with emphasis on the collective securitization of one particular South American organization. Unlike the existing bibliography on UNASUR, our analysis has been pursued through a discursive and expanded approach to security that transcends the field of defense, and we have considered a broader time-range in order to arrive at a more weighted analysis of what UNASUR’s tenure has meant for these issues. Certain processes of desecuritization have likewise been taken into account as an infra-theorized aspect of these approaches. Specifically, two of them have been identified: the hypotheses around conflict among countries and the drugs and citizenship security response.

In considering the desecuritization of the hypotheses of conflict among South American countries, and the tensions between them, the genesis of that desecuritization — driven by a Brazilian strategy and negotiated through then-president Lula da Silva and other high-level agents like Defense Minister Jobim — must be distinguished from its subsequent institutionalization, in which Brazil also assumed an initially active role, relatively withdrawn in later years in the face of greater assertiveness from Argentina. Following the establishment of the SDC as a forum for political dialogue, coordination, and cooperation, 156 activities were gradually and flexibly scheduled from 2009 to 2017 around the four axes that structure the organization’s action plans.

Together, these activities aspired to consolidate the region as a Zone of Peace, to articulate a regional defense identity, and to deepen South American cooperation in general. Less directly and explicitly, the willingness of policy makers to replace the inter-American system was also confirmed. In the period analyzed, the path toward achieving these ends was pursued largely through discourse and the creation of spaces for communication, learning, and joint socialization, all aimed at fostering a regional identity, regional norms, and an alternative institutionality.

Until 2015, the level of appropriation and implementation of the programmed activities remained above 80%, despite the global economic crisis and the sweeping change in the South American political cycle that led to the subsequent paralysis of both the SDC and the Center for Strategic Studies for Defense (CEED). Two principal fissures present during the development of the SDC have affected its results. On the one hand, strong asymmetries persisted between a bloc of countries with the capacity to assume responsibilities in the council's development (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela) and countries lacking such capabilities (Bolivia, Guyana, Paraguay, Suriname, and Uruguay), thereby frustrating more cooperative operations. On the other hand, considerable distrust was generated by Colombia among its UNASUR partners from the outset, and this distrust was not alleviated during the institutionalization process. Moreover, Colombia's relatively weak presence and participation, along with certain decisions made by the country in its foreign and defense policy, undermined regional spaces for socialization and learning, as well as the generation of consensus.

The other dynamic of desecuritization put into practice in the era of UNASUR concerns the drug problem. The underlying idea was to move beyond the region's dominant narrative and securitized practices, where punitive and militarized responses had centered on supply. Various Latin American *fora* advocated a desecuritized vision instead, focusing on public health and human rights through a comprehensive approach that recognized both supply and demand. UNASUR, as a desecuritizing actor, did seek to contribute to this advance, although little progress was achieved and internal inconsistencies persisted. From its concerted position presented at the UNGASS summit, at an extra-regional scale, to its difficulties in setting up the South American Drug Observatory at the regional level, UNASUR has failed to overcome the state-centric visions that have impeded progress in this regard, squandering a window of opportunity that was opened in 2016.

The CEED, meanwhile, has fulfilled its role as a functional actor, thereby corroborating certain theses by Sperling and Webber (2017), who suggest that such a regional body should provide both a space and an agency for collective securitization. One CEED report justified the implementation of a sectoral council separate from the CSPMD: the South American Council of Citizen Security, Justice and Transnational Organized Crime (CSDOT). These two councils have been among the least active within UNASUR, due to the diversity and divergence of views on both issues (citizen security and the drug problem), as well as an attachment to traditional, Westphalian conceptions of national sovereignty in the region, which have complicated the pursuit of transnational concerns, such as those involving drugs or organized crime.

Beyond particular results related to the formal objectives of these councils, it should be recalled that both spaces, like UNASUR as a whole, have responded to the objectives of ‘post-liberal regionalism,’ intended to expand autonomy while limiting the regional influence of the United States, as well as that of the Organization of American States as a space in which to address such issues. In addition, the articulation of UNASUR’s organizational charter has favored the vision of countries like Argentina that sought to differentiate between citizen security (internal) and defense (external).

This paper has also sought to further develop reflection on the RSCT, based on social-constructivist premises. This would imply extracting more from its meta-theory – securitization – and therefore its epistemological foundation, which is intersubjective and distinct from the neorealist substratum that informs *Regions & Powers*. In order not to lose sight of the original objective pursued by Buzan and Wæver with this theory — to articulate a theoretical tool for the comparative study of the structure and dynamics of regional security —, it seems appropriate that any reformulation of the RSCT worked first on the analysis of securitization/desecuritization processes that take place on a regional scale and in different geographical areas. The agenda of collective securitization contributes to that task, and the present study offers a “micro” contribution, examining particular areas of South American response through a decade of reflection and practices.

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