

The brazilian participation in the United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Mission for the stabilization of the Central African Republic: a study regarding its geopolitical viability

La participación brasileña en la Misión Multidimensional Integrada de las Naciones Unidas para la estabilización de la República Centroafricana: un estudio sobre su viabilidad geopolítica

ABSTRACT: Recently, the Brazilian government was consulted by the United Nations (UN) and has conducted studies to participate in the Integrated Multidimensional Mission of the United Nations for the stabilization of the CAR (Central African Republic) (MINUSCA) by sending troops. In this context, the current article aims to analyze the Central African issue, concluding on its influence in the Brazilian geopolitics for Africa. Initially, the Central African issue was analyzed. Then, the main geopolitical actions of Brazil for Africa were described as mentioned in the National Defense Policy, the National Defense Strategy and the foreign policy guidelines of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally, the Central African issue was related to the geopolitical actions of Brazil in Africa, in order to solve the problem proposed and to evaluate the feasibility of the participation of Brazilian troops in MINUSCA, from the perspective of geopolitics.

Keywords: Central African Republic. Peace operations. United Nations (UN). Geopolitics. Western Africa.

RESUMO: Recentemente, o governo brasileiro foi consultado pela Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU) e tem realizado estudos no sentido de participar da Missão Multidimensional Integrada das Nações Unidas para a estabilização da CAR (MINUSCA) com envio de tropas. Nesse contexto, o presente artigo tem por objetivo analisar a questão centro-africana, concluindo sobre sua influência na geopolítica brasileira para a África. Inicialmente, foi analisada a questão centro-africana. Em seguida, foram descritas as principais ações geopolíticas do Brasil para a África, conforme preconiza a Política Nacional de Defesa, a Estratégia Nacional de Defesa e as diretrizes de política externa do Ministério das Relações Exteriores. Por fim, relacionou-se a questão centro-africana com as ações geopolíticas do Brasil na África, a fim de se solucionar o problema proposto e no intuito de avaliar a viabilidade da participação de tropas brasileiras na MINUSCA, sob a ótica da geopolítica.

Palavras-chave: República Centro-Africana. Operações de paz. ONU. Geopolítica. África Ocidental.

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Received: Jul. 16, 2018

Accepted: Feb. 26, 2019

COLEÇÃO MEIRA MATTOS

ISSN on-line 2316-4891 / ISSN print 2316-4833

<http://ebrevistas.eb.mil.br/index.php/RMM/index>



1 Introduction

The Central African Republic (CAR) is an old French colony located in the hinterland of Africa, which gained its independence in 1960. Since its emancipation, the country started to be governed by a series of autocratic governments, which contributed to the current instability in the region.

However, the root of the crisis in the CAR is at the French policy of assimilation, which guided the entire colonial administration of the former French Equatorial Africa (KAH, 2016, p. 42). Through this policy, the metropolis formed local aristocracies, endowed with privileges that, on the other hand, collaborated with the colonizers, thus leading to an ethnicization of the post-independence state, because the elites began to privilege their ethnic groups in the exercise of politics. This situation, until the present days, is one of the main causes of conflicts that devastate the country.

However, other reasons can be listed to explain the current conflict in the CAR. Abdenur and Kuele (2017, p. 1, our translation) state that

the violence in the country is something recurrent, involving historical roots, such as the cattle dispute and the control of the exploitation of diamonds, the discontent of minorities and the absence of a State. These characteristics interact with an extremely dynamic panorama since 2013, whose immediate causes are related to the rapid fragmentation and reconfiguration of illegal armed groups, especially the former Seleka coalition and the anti-Balaka militias, acquiring sectarian dimensions. The combination of these historical and contemporary elements leads to a scenario of high unpredictability and creates challenges for the support of peace.

The aggravation of the crisis in the CAR has led to the deployment of several UN peace missions, and the most recent ones are: the United Nations Mission for CAR (MINURCA) (1997-2000), the Integrated Office of the United Nations for peacebuilding in the CAR (BINUCA) (2010), the International Mission to Support the CAR (MISCA) (2013) and, more recently, the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission of the CAR (MINUSCA) (2014 until the present days) (UNITED NATIONS, 2014).

MINUSCA currently has more than ten thousand soldiers, one thousand eight hundred policemen, in addition to the civilian component of the mission (UNITED NATIONS, 2014). Within the military component, there are officers of the Brazilian Armed Forces in the role of military observers and staff officers, but the troop consists predominantly of armed forces of the African Union and the European Union. However, recent scandals involving United Nations (UN) military personnel in the CAR have generated prejudice to the troop image among the local population and the international community, which has affected the credibility of the mission (GIELOW, 2017a).

At the same time, Brazil ended its participation with troops in the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH)¹ on October 15th, 2017 and, due to the

¹ MINUSTAH was established in Haiti in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution Number 1542 of April 30th, 2004 (UNITED NATIONS, 2004), after the crisis that was set in the country, with the resignation of the then-President Jean Bertrand Aristide. The military component of the mission was under the command of Brazil, which also had the largest number of troops in the country, which gave it a relevant international projection.

success of its work in the Caribbean country, it has been probed by the UN to send troops to other missions in Africa, and CAR is one of the possible destinations (GIELOW, 2017b).

However, the relevance of the Brazilian participation in MINUSCA has been questioned, insofar as the CAR is not a part of the Brazilian strategic environment (Western Africa) (FREITAS, 2004) and the fact that Brazil would not be able to afford the financial burden of one more peacekeeping mission. According to government information, Brazil spent, around two billion and five hundred million reais (Brazilian currency) in its participation of MINUSTAH and was reimbursed in only nine hundred and thirty million reais (Brazilian currency) by the UN (GARBIN, 2017).

In this context, the present research aims to answer the following question: to what extent does the Central African issue influence Brazilian geopolitics for Africa? It is hoped, with the answer to this problem, to conclude regarding the feasibility of sending Brazilian troops to CAR, based on geopolitical premisses.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 recommends in its fourth article that Brazil is governed in its international relations by several principles, among them, the peaceful solution of conflicts and the defense of peace (BRASIL, 2011), highlighting the concern of Brazilian foreign policy with initiatives for world peace, including peace operations.

Historically, Brazil has contributed to many peace missions, from the League of Nations until the present days. The presence of an officer of the Brazilian Navy in the League of Nations Commission that managed the conflict between Colombia and Peru between 1933 and 1934 marks the beginning of Brazilian participation in these operations (RIBEIRO, 2014). But between 1947 and 1951, under the aegis of the UN, Brazil sent two officers to the Balkans (RIBEIRO, 2014), demonstrating that the country is a historic contributor to the United Nations. Since the creation of the UN in 1945, Brazil has already participated in fourteen peace operations, having been MINUSTAH in Haiti the most relevant in terms of the quantity of employees (more than 1,000 soldiers per contingent).

Thus, the research is justified, because a study regarding the feasibility of the employment of Brazilian peacekeepers in CAR is a matter of national interest, insofar as one of the national defense objectives (NDO), as stated in the National Defense Policy, is “to contribute with the increase of Brazil’s projection in the concert of nations and their insertion in international decision-making processes” (BRASIL, 2012, p. 13). Therefore, intensifying Brazilian participation in international operations would contribute to this NDO (BRASIL, 2012).

It is also worth emphasizing that this paper consists of an article of bibliographical and documentary revision, whose general objective is to analyze the Central African question, concluding on its influence in the Brazilian geopolitics for Africa. To this end, the following specific objectives were established: to analyze the Central African problem; to describe the main geopolitical actions of Brazil for Africa at the present days; to relate the Central African issue with Brazil’s geopolitical actions in Africa; and to evaluate the feasibility of the Brazilian participation in MINUSCA, from the point of view of geopolitics.

Due to the qualitative perspective of this research, two theoretical variables were adopted: the Brazilian geopolitics for Africa (dependent variable); and the Central African issue (independent variable). Hence, it is intended to verify to what extent each of the factors of the independent variable exerts influence on the main Brazilian geopolitical actions in the present days, ongoing in Africa.

2 The central african issue

The process of decolonization in the regions of Africa under French rule increased considerably after the Second World War. The self-determination of peoples, reinforced by the newly created UN, and the economic weakening of the European powers in the post-war period were preponderant factors to foster the longing for independence of African countries (ARRUDA, 1988).

France, in an attempt to maintain its dominions, developed a policy of assimilation aimed at creating elites in the French style in the colonies, endowed with all the privileges of the French citizens, whereas a large part of the population remained unintegrated and slavishly exploited (ARRUDA, 1988; KAH, 2016).

Thus, even with some concessions given by the French Constitution of 1946, the triggering of liberation movements in the colonies was inevitable, and by the way, many of them were marked by violence (ARRUDA, 1988; BOUITY, 1996).

CAR became independent from France on August 13th, 1960, under the government of David Dacko, who during his term, made his party, the so called *Mouvement d'Evolution Sociale de l'Afrique Noire* (MESAN)², become the only one legally established in the country. With this issue, he began to favor his supporters, creating political positions and raising his salaries, contributing to the discontent of the population and to aggravate the economic situation of the country (BOUITY, 1996; GILES-VERNICK; O'TOOLE; KAH, 2016; VAN HOOGST RATEN, 2017).

The political sectarianism and the successive economic crises in the country, generated to a great extent by the political mentality developed with the assimilation of the colonial time, contributed to the aggravation of the stability of the CAR, which has suffered numerous coups d'état (GIROUX, LANZ, SGUAITAMATTI, 2009) which have compromised, to the present days, the local infrastructure, have emptied the economic investments in the country and have increased the political and institutional crisis.

More recently, in 2005, after the election of General François Bozizé to the presidency of the CAR, conflict between government forces and rebels in the north of the country led to the flight of tens of thousands of civilians to Chad (GIROUX; LANZ; SGUAITAMATTI, 2009). At the same time, clashes in Darfur have directly affected the region, which has also been the target of violence from that region. Meanwhile, in the south of the country, Ugandan rebel groups, notably the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)³, also violated the territory of the CAR, following an offensive led by the Ugandan government against the groups, generating more security problems for the Central African population (GILES-VERNICK; O'TOOLE; VAN HOOGST RATEN, 2017).

In 2012, after arbitrary arrests carried out by Bozizé under the pretext of a possible coup d'état that could be ongoing, a rebel coalition called *Séléka* was created, composed of Muslims from the northeast of the country, led by Michel Djotodia. The most probable causes for the

2 The Movement for the Social Evolution of Black Africa (MESAN) party was founded in 1946 by Barthélemy Boganda. MESAN exercised control of the first territorial assembly of the CAR in 1957 and was the party of the first president of the country, David Dacko (GILES-VERNICK; O'TOOLE; VAN HOOGST RATEN, 2017).

3 LRA is a militant group led by Joseph Kony who fought a war against the government of Uganda and neighboring countries from the 1980s (BUNTING, 2011).

emergence of the *Seléka* were government corruption, ethnic and religious issues - insofar as the Muslims did not feel represented politically - and government incompetence in promoting the country's development (CAMPOS *et al.*, 2016; KAH, 2016).

Even after a peace agreement between the rebels and the government in 2013, the *Seléka* group overthrew Bozizé, taking over the presidency Michel Djotodia. However, due to the economic crisis, Djotodia did not have the resources to finance the *Seléka* and thus failed to maintain the cohesion of the rebel group, which was largely made up of foreigners, who depended on the currency received in the group for their subsistence. Having seen that they were not able to return to their countries of origin, they began to rely on local looting (CAMPOS *et al.*, 2016). This situation led to the emergence of Christian militias called *Anti-balaka*, which aimed to combat the *Seléka* (CAMPOS *et al.*, 2016).

Faced with the chaos generated by conflicts between Christians and Muslims, the UN has authorized a number of interventions between December 2013 and the present days, the last intervention was from MINUSCA, in order to contain sectarian violence, thus preventing the conflict from turning into genocide (UNITED NATIONS, 2014).

It must be noted that the UN and other regional and international organizations, before 2013, had already undertaken a number of interventions in the country in order to ensure stability in the region. Table 1 below shows the main external interventions that took place in CAR:

Table 1 - External interventions in CAR

MISSION	PERIOD	LEADERSHIP
MINURCA	1998-2000	UN
BONUCA	2000-2009	UN
FOMUC	2003-2008	CEMAC* (Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States)
EUFOR Tchad/CAR	2007-2009	EU (European Union)
MINURCAT	2007-2010	UN
MICOPAX	2008-2013	CEEAC** (Economic Community of Central African States)
BINUCA	2009-2014	UN
SANGARIS Operation	2013-2016	France
MISCA	2013-2014	African Union
EUFOR CAR	2014-2015	EU (European Union)
MINUSCA	2014-current	UN

*Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC) (KAH, 2016).

**Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) (KAH, 2016).

Source: ABDENUR; KUELE, 2017.

Added to the factors of instability in the country is the fact that its armed forces do not have the structural capacity to deal with the conflict between rival factions. CAR has a small army, an aeronautics service and a national police force, but military service is not compulsory

(CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, 2017). Besides, several internal rebellions in the military and the difficulty in reintegrating ex-combatants show the disruption of military institutions (MARQUES, 2015). Thus, with few reservists, internal revolts and lack of resources to support an armed force compatible with their needs, the country is highly dependent on UN forces to maintain its stability and security.

At the beginning of 2015, the United Nations Specialized Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had estimated that the number of refugees was four hundred and fifty-one thousand. But the number of internal displaced persons, who were displaced at the beginning of 2017, was close to six hundred thousand (CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, 2017), which, for a population of approximately five million six hundred thousand people, is a very significant number.

Still concerning the psychosocial situation of the CAR, it is worth mentioning that the country counts on more than 80 ethnic groups, each one with their respective languages and cultures. In addition, there are different religious groups in the country, 35% of the population inclined to indigenous cults, 25% to Protestantism, 25% to Catholicism and 15% to Islamism (ALUSALA, 2007 *apud* KAH, 2016). Thereby, the religious and socio-cultural diversity existing in the country is a factor that potentiates internal conflicts (BOUITY, 1996), which is very evident in the recent conflicts between the *Seléka* and the *Anti-balaka*.

The country's economy is basically dependent on subsistence agriculture, timber extraction and mining, mainly diamond, gold, copper and uranium (KAH, 2016), which makes CAR a country with natural resources with the potential to generate conflicts. Marques (2015) reports that much of the country's weak economic development is due to illegal exploitation of natural resources, precarious infrastructures and the priority given only to the capital, which has caused serious social inequalities.

Therefore, despite the fact that CAR is a member of CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States) and CEEAC (Economic Community of Central African States) and owns large quantities of mineral reserves (KAH, 2016), smuggling of these resources, lack of transport infrastructure and lack of exit to the sea (only through river ports) make it difficult to dispose of the country's production, thus compromising the economic development of CAR (CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, 2017).

Thereby, it can be partially concluded that state bankruptcy in the CAR is a factor of regional destabilization in Africa. Conflicts erupted in the country have generated a humanitarian crisis that directly affects neighboring countries, with an increasing number of refugees. Besides, violence in the region, exacerbated by the flow of refugees and the incapacity of the armed forces, has extrapolated the country's borders, affecting other adjacent nations, including those in Western Africa, which are part of the Brazilian strategic environment.

3 The brazilian geopolitics for Africa

The word "geopolitics" first appeared in the writings of Swedish professor and jurist Rudolf Kjellén in 1899. For Kjellén, geopolitics consists of "State science as a geographic organism, as it manifests itself in space" (CHAUPRADE, 2001 *apud* BRAGA, 2011, page 147).

In this context, from the 1920s, pioneering studies of geopolitics emerged in Brazil, with highlights such as the works produced by Everardo Backheuser, Delgado de Carvalho and

Mário Travassos⁴, whose focuses were, above all, the consolidation of the national territory and the projection of the country in the South American continent (FREITAS, 2004).

It was, however, with the studies of Golbery do Couto e Silva⁵ that the African continent gained greater relevance for the Brazilian Geopolitical School. In his theory of hemicycles, Golbery defined two concentric circumferences that delimited regions that were considered essential to the national security of Brazil. The inner hemicycle, in particular, covered what is now understood as the Brazilian strategic environment, which includes the South Atlantic and Western (or Atlantic) Africa (FREITAS, 2004; NASCIMENTO, 2016), evidencing the importance of that continent to Brazil. On the other hand, the outer hemicycle encompassed the rest of Africa, Europe and Asia, and it was considered by Golbery to be the “dangerous hemicycle”, from which the potential threats to national security would arise. Picture 1, below, shows the Golberian hemicycle:

Picture 1 - South America and the inner and outer hemicycle



Source: Silva (1981 *apud* NASCIMENTO, 2016)

In the same line of thought as Golbery, General Carlos de Meira Mattos emphasized in his studies the world projection of Brazil, with the South Atlantic and Africa as regions that would naturally be a priority for Brazilian geopolitics, in the face of geographic determinism itself. For

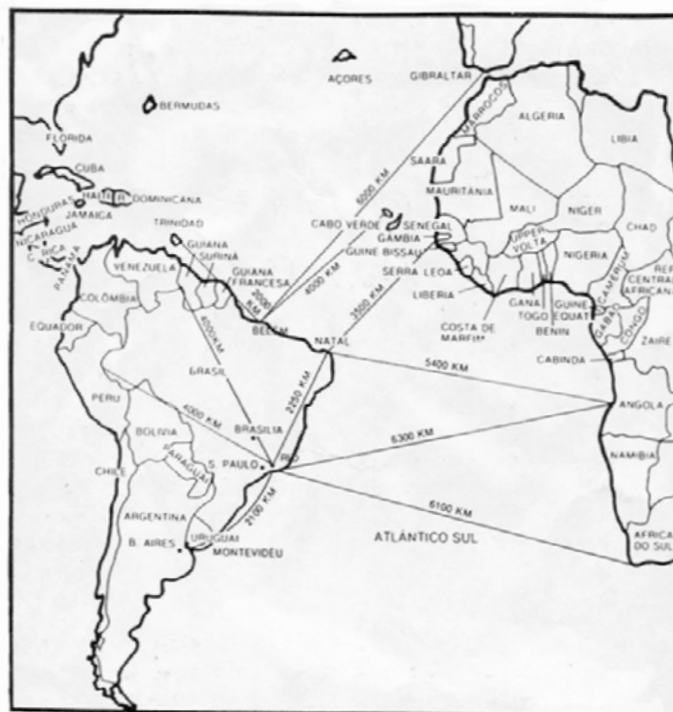
4 For Travassos (1938), Brazil's continental projection stems from the neutralization of the concentric power of the platinum basin, the attraction force of the Amazon, and the coordinating capacity of the Atlantic coast.

5 Set in the context of the Cold War, Golbery's international studies focused mainly on containing the Soviet threat. For him, Brazil's international geopolitical objectives, in the face of this threat, would be to combat underdevelopment, through alignment with the United States; to watch over Atlantic Africa, both against subversion and against possible Soviet advances; and strengthen Pan-Americanism (CARVALHO, 2010).

him, “the advantage of our maritimity will always be based on a respectable strategic presence in the South Atlantic” (MATTOS, 2000).

Within Nicholas Spykman’s strategic conception of containment of Soviet expansionism, as well as Golbery, Meira Mattos advocated the creation of a collective defense system in the South Atlantic, involving Western African countries, integrated with the structure of defense of the West as a whole (GABRIEL, 2012), reinforcing that the region was vital for Brazilian national security. Picture 2 below shows the geostrategic projection of Brazil according to Meira Mattos and demonstrates the importance of the South Atlantic and the west of the African continent for Brazilian geopolitics:

Picture 2 - Geostrategic projection of Brazil according to Meira Mattos



Source: MATTOS (2000)

Although, historically, there have been periods of oscillation in bilateral relations between Brazil and Africa, especially at the time of the decolonization of that continent (ASSIS, 2011), nowadays, Brazilian foreign policy recognizes the relevance of Africa and the South Atlantic for the projection of the country in the international scenario, not only in the defense field, but also in the economic and commercial scope (BRASIL, 2017), in line with the theoretical assumptions of the Brazilian Geopolitical School.

The growing importance of oil and natural gas in the world economy places special emphasis on the recent oil basins discovered off the coast of countries covered by the South Atlantic (NEVES, 2015). Besides, the research indicates that this important oceanic region has resources of high economic value, such as iron, manganese and polymetallic sulphides, mainly around the archipelagos of São Pedro and São Paulo and Trindade island. (BROZOSKI; PADULA, 2016).

Among the main Brazilian objectives in the South Atlantic are: the maintenance of the integrity of the national patrimony that includes, besides the territorial and patrimonial sea, the waters, soil and subsoil of the continental shelf; the guarantee of free transit for Brazilian foreign trade; and the exploitation of economic potential, including natural resources and trade exchange; projection that guarantees the surveillance on the lines of maritime communication that give access to the Brazilian territory (COUTO, 1999 *apud* COSTA, 2013, page 4, our translation).

Therefore, in view of the geopolitical constraints presented, it can be noted that some current initiatives in Brazilian international relations are directly related to the determinism of space and position between Brazil and Africa, such as the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZOPACAS), the multilateral IBAS (India, Brazil and South Africa) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) forums and the Brazilian participation in peace missions in the African countries.

ZOPACAS was created in 1986, through Resolution 41/11 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, in order to promote regional cooperation in the South Atlantic, the social and economic development of its members, the mutual conservation of natural resources and the maintenance of peace and security in the region (UNITED NATIONS, 1986). The establishment of a conflict-free zone in the South Atlantic is in the interest of all Member States, as it allows international maritime trade with minimal security risks, thus contributing to the growth of the regional economy.

In addition, the IBAS forums and BRICS also highlight Brazil's intention to approach South Africa. Needless to say the strategic value of this country for Brazil (BRASIL, 2017), because its coastal zone is a route of passage from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, through the Cape of Good Hope. Thereby, closer diplomatic ties between the two countries allow Brazil to extend its trade to the other side of the African continent and to Asia, leveraging the country's geopolitical projection beyond its strategic environment.

Furthermore, the increase in Brazilian participation in peace missions in Africa would increase Brazil's insertion in that continent and contribute to the mitigation of regional conflicts (BRASIL, 2012). A stable Africa would also bring greater stability to the South Atlantic and the Western portion of the continent, regions that present themselves as Brazil's security limit (MATTOS *apud* FREITAS, 2004).

Regarding the extrapolation of conflicts from Central Africa to the rest of the continent, Migon and Santos discuss about it. (2013, p. 8, our translation):

The presence of huge deposits of gold, diamonds and rare metals (especially columbite and tantalite) feeds the dynamics of conflicts in the region, and it has involved five countries and several guerrilla groups in the 1998-2003 civil war, also known as the "World War of Africa."

Aguilar (2015) also reinforces that participating in peace missions is related to the projection of power, achieving foreign policy objectives, increasing the deterrence strategy, strengthening ties with friendly countries, providing humanitarian aid under the prism of

non-indifference, presence in the priority strategic environments for Brazil (such as Atlantic Africa) and support for a greater insertion of the country in the international security decision-making process.

It is also worth noting that Brazilian maritime transport is responsible for a large part of its trade relations, which reinforces the relevance of a peaceful region in the South Atlantic, as the economic interdependence of countries has abruptly increased with globalization (BRASIL, 2012; NEVES, 2015; NYE Jr, 1988).

In short, the stability and development of Africa, especially its western portion, are of interest to Brazilian geopolitics, due to the strategic importance of the South Atlantic for defense (the Brazilian eastern border) and for the Brazilian foreign trade, reinforcing the assertions of the Brazilian Geopolitical School.

4 Impact of the central african issue on brazilian geopolitics for the african continent

If on the one hand, CAR is not part of the strategic environment of Brazil, on the other hand, it is contained in Golbery's "dangerous hemicycle". However, it must be born in mind that the context in which the theory of hemicycles was developed was characterized by the Cold War, in which the East (that was strongly represented by the former Soviet Union) was in the zone of communist influence, while the western governments were in the sphere of influence of the United States.

Although the present conjuncture is distinct from the 1950s, the Golberian theory still applies, mainly with regard to the delimitation of spaces of national interest, in this case, the Brazilian strategic environment. Besides, the South Atlantic remains an important region for the economic expression of national power, noting that it is an area that concentrates a large part of Brazil's commercial outlets (BRASIL, 2012; NEVES, 2015) and which is rich in strategic natural resources (BROZOSKI; PADULA, 2016; COUTO, 1999 *apud* COSTA, 2013), reinforcing the validity of the Golberian hemicycle and the statements of Meira Mattos to explain most of Brazil's current international projection, particularly in relation to Western Africa and the South Atlantic.

Therefore, an instability in the outer hemicycle affects the inner hemicycle, mainly if the reasons for the problem lie in the vicinity of the inner circumference, which defines the Brazilian strategic environment. Thus, it is perceived that the conflict in the CAR affects the neighboring nations of Atlantic Africa, such as Cameroon, Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), especially if the flow of refugees grows towards the Atlantic. It is noteworthy that these countries are part of ZOPACAS and a humanitarian crisis that goes beyond the borders of CAR can affect an important region for Brazilian geopolitics.

Regarding South Africa, which has strategic importance for Brazil (BRASIL, 2017), as can be inferred from the composition of IBAS and BRICS, it is verified that, due to the distance of the CAR, the crisis in that country does not directly affect South Africa. However, it links with several other conflicts in the African continent, such as those in South Sudan, Somalia, Mali, DRC, Liberia and Western Sahara, forming a veritable instability belt in South Africa region, consequently generating effects across Africa. Thus, a South Africa affected

by another source of conflict in its surroundings can negatively impact Brazilian geopolitical actions, primarily for two reasons: firstly, because South Africa has regional leadership on the African continent and is a key element in the stability of Africa; and the second, because the country is a component of ZOPACAS (South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone) and a conflict region on the continent that affects South Africa can jeopardize all security and peacekeeping in that block.

Regarding the Brazilian participation in peace missions in Africa, suffice it to say that the stabilization initiatives of the African continent are very positive for the Brazilian geopolitics (AGUILAR, 2015), noting that Africa is the eastern limit for the security of Brazil (MATOS apud FREITAS, 2004; BRASIL, 2012). Thus, regardless of the location in Africa, these actions must be increased by the positive effect they generate in the geopolitical projection of Brazil and the stabilization of the Brazilian strategic environment.

Besides, other benefits can come from a greater insertion of Brazil in the center of Africa, mainly in the political and economic fields. Stuenkel (2017), while defending Brazil's participation in MINUSCA, states that the developed countries have already proved incapable of solving the many international conflicts alone, and it is imprudent to leave the future of global order in the hands of the few countries.

This statement is aligned with the multilateralism defended by Brazilian foreign policy (BRASIL, 2017), as well as it meets the guidelines of the current National Defense Policy (NDP) (BRASIL, 2012), concerning the increase in Brazilian participation in international operations.

An assertive foreign policy is fundamental to deal with domestic problems, even though contrary arguments may arise. Trade negotiations with other economic blocs, joint investments with other countries in areas such as infrastructure and regional integration initiatives are examples of advantages to be gained by increased foreign relations (STUENKEL, 2017).

In the same way, the assumptions of neoliberalism reinforce the importance of relationships between countries (NYE Jr, 1988) and Brazil recognizes the relevance of increasing interaction with the African continent, either through its Geopolitical School, or through the current actions of the Brazilian foreign policy for Africa (BRASIL, 2017).

Consequently, although Brazilian interests are not directly related to the crisis in the Central African Republic, an active participation of the country in MINUSCA would strengthen its legitimacy to influence future debates on African issues (STUENKEL, 2017), which is also affirmed by Aguilar (2015).

Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the bankruptcy of the State, the humanitarian, economic and social crises and the conflict that afflicts the CAR generate negative repercussions for Africa and, as a consequence, also in its western portion. Thereby, it can influence Brazil's geopolitical actions for the African continent, as the instability prevailing in the Central African Republic has a negative impact on ZOPACAS, on South Africa - which is a key factor in the stability of the continent - and on the maintenance of peace in Africa, as a whole.

5 Final considerations

The geographical determinism observed between Brazil and Africa is enough to bring about a natural approximation between the country and that continent. The national geopolitical theses themselves confirm this by mentioning the strategic importance of Africa to Brazil and the need to maintain the stability and security of the South Atlantic. After all, the South Atlantic is fundamental for economic and social development, whether in Brazil or in the African continent as a whole, mainly because it concentrates much of the trade routes on both sides of the Ocean.

The studies of geopolitics in Brazil, when they refer to Africa, focus mostly on the western part of the continent, due to their proximity and relevance, insofar as the Brazilian strategic environment is concerned. However, globalization, economic interdependence between countries and the transnationality of current threats (terrorism and organized crime), which find fertile ground in “failed states” for their activities, are aspects that contribute to the permeability of borders, often potentiating the problems of a state far beyond its boundaries. In this way, the arguments analyzed suggest that the Central African question has considerable potential to affect Brazilian geopolitics on the African continent, although it is not directly contained in Brazil’s strategic environment.

Thus, the Brazilian participation with troops in MINUSCA would be a viable action from the point of view of geopolitics, considering that it would contribute to the stabilization of the center of Africa and, consequently, of the entire continent, including its Atlantic portion, which is the main focus of Brazil’s foreign policy for Africa. In addition, the increase in the number of Brazilian troops under the aegis of the UN would greatly contribute to the projection of the country abroad, making it a major player in the decisions of international politics.

The advantages that can be drawn by the country in its foreign relations are numerous. Investment in the area of defense, increased cooperation between Brazil and Africa, improvement of the image of Brazil in the global sphere and maintenance of peace in the South Atlantic are some of the gains that can be highlighted with a greater Brazilian projection through the UN peace missions in the African continent. To a certain extent, it would be convenient that the success of the military component in MINUSTAH was used by Brazil, noting that the country is in evidence before the United Nations, which has required a greater involvement of the country in peace operations.

However, it must be recognized that a political decision to send military contingents to a country outside the Brazilian strategic environment encompasses issues other than geopolitics. In the words of Aguilar (2011), it is an issue that involves motivations ranging from humanitarian aid, devoid of any other intention, to the international projection itself.

To this end, studies aimed at the political and economic impact of the participation of Brazilian troops in MINUSCA and the logistical implications for the military component for the deployment of its means in the CAR are suggested, given the cost involved in sending troops to the outside and the difficulty imposed to the logistics by the absence of exit to the sea for that country.

At last, it is necessary to recall Brazil's commitment to the peaceful settlement of conflicts, the defense of peace and the prevalence of human rights contained in its Constitution, which are fundamental principles of their international relations. Thus, in addition to the geopolitical tenets recommending a greater Brazilian insertion in Africa, there is also the responsibility to protect the civilian population of the CAR, that is strongly impacted by a conflict that has extrapolated its national borders and which has considerably affected the neighboring nations.

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