

INFLUENCE OF MILITARY DRONES ON GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR LATIN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

Drones have been studied and used in the military for years. These vehicles have become increasingly popular in the military field due to their ability to carry out surveillance, reconnaissance and attack missions while being remotely controlled and flying for long hours. Currently, it is possible to observe several developed countries that already use this technology to guarantee their national sovereignty, however the vast majority of Latin American countries have not yet realized the importance of having drones as a geopolitical influence in the world of which they are part. Since they were created, these devices have been in constant development and improvement and it is possible to see them appearing in everyday society for various functions. This work shows that the ownership of modern drones for use in the military area is an important technological advantage for countries with great development potential such as Brazil and others in Latin America in the current geopolitical context.

Key words — Drones, Latin America, defense, economy, geopolitics.

1. INTRODUCTION

After the creation of the first planes, the search for an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) began to accelerate, especially in the military. Since the First World War, the use of these drones began to gain a good proportion, although they were difficult to take off and return, in addition to flight stability problems. This development of drones in the military continued strong in the Second World War, Cold War, Vietnam and the Gulf with great and important technological advances throughout the 20th century (Keane, 2013).

Countries such as the United States, Turkey, and others already extensively use drones in the military, as mentioned by Kasapoglu (2022) and Crosston (2022).

More recently, the actions of these vehicles in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia were also widely seen and publicized, where it was possible to see even more the

current impact that this technology can give to the countries that have it (Horton, 2023).

For developing Latin American countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, etc., drone technology is essential to modernize scientifically and politically. In a few years, countries that do not invest in this field could be left behind, with great potential for economic losses (Joseph, 2023). These Latin American countries have a high interest in forming economic blocs or integrating into existing ones such as the BRICS (Martins, 2023), in addition to positioning themselves better in the economic ranking, but without the modernization of military and defense technologies they will not be able to impose a good printing for other countries that are increasingly developed in this field.

UAV technology is already transforming the world geopolitically, with impacts and collaborations between governments and economies (Días, 2022). All countries that aim to grow and develop need to be up to date with this new technology, as these UAVs increasingly show that they will be actively present in people's daily lives and in the world itself.

2. LATIN-AMERICAN CONTEXT

Despite constant wars around the world, Latin American countries initially had a peaceful relationship with each other. However, when conflicts such as the Cisplatine War and the Silver War are remembered, it is possible to realize that neighboring countries in South America did not always have a history of peace.

These 19th-century wars are very clear examples of friction between countries with physical consequences for those involved. However, Latin American countries also often go through wars in a geopolitical context, and as they do not present material losses, they often go unnoticed.

As analyzed by (Casarões, 2020), in the 90s, when the Gulf War happened, Argentina rushed to help the USA by sending troops to the Middle East. This move put Brazilian President Fernando Collor in a difficult situation, as Brazil could not immediately break trade relations with Saddam Hussein and risk Brazilian companies and citizens residing in Iraq.

This situation also served as a test for partnerships between the USA and Latin American countries and caused

discomfort in relations between South American countries in relation to commercial benefits. According to (Casarões, 2020), this event was crucial in explaining why relations between the USA and Brazil became more tense in the following years, in addition to showing how large outside countries can influence the geopolitics of neighboring countries.

Continuing in the context of Brazil and Argentina, the economic partnership between these two countries can often be confused with rivalry, as shown by Schenoni (2017). However, peaceful discussions and concessions between these two countries often occur when the commercial costs of confrontations are high and partnership is more beneficial for this bilateral relationship.

More recently, it is also possible to observe friction between Venezuela and Guyana with direct consequences for Brazil as it borders both countries. According to (Coelho, 2023), Venezuela's main interest in the region is the large volume of oil, which is an important resource to reduce the economic, political and social crisis. Furthermore, we have the 2024 presidential elections in Venezuela, which have not yet been completely defined, opening up more political possibilities in this conflict.

This moment between Venezuela and Guyana may seem recent as new oil reserves were discovered in the Essequibo region, but as shown by (Araújo, 2016) these disputes started at least a century ago, with Venezuelan claims starting at least as far back as 1899 when the "Paris Arbitration Award" validated English control over the Essequibo region.

In this context, with some quotes from the relations between Latin American countries among themselves over the years, it is possible to observe that countries in this bloc that modernize technologically to protect their borders have an advantage over other countries in the bloc. The best way to protect large borders today is through UAVs.

For countries mainly in South America around the Amazon region, the use of modern drones is essential. These vehicles can fly over regions that are difficult for humans to access and are equipped with a large number of sensors to send information.

As shown in this section, to guarantee their sovereignty and protection, Latin American countries that are more modernized and equipped with recent drone technology will have advantages, in addition to geopolitical influence in relation to their neighbors and the Latin American bloc itself.

3. INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES

As shown in the previous section, Latin American countries have an inevitable relationship with each other due to their geographical position.

Countries outside the Latin American bloc observe their economy with great interest, as seen in the book (Child, 1979), where the author shows the interest of country authorities in dividing Brazil and the South American

continent into islands for the control of Brazilian territory in association with the USA, mainly with regard to the Amazon region. Figure 1 shows this geopolitical division of the territory according to Golbery cited in (Child, 1979).

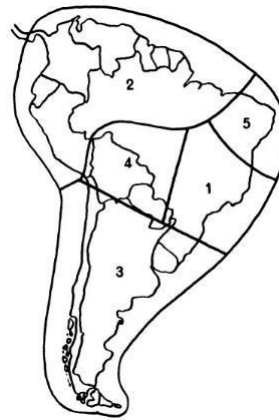


Figure 1. Geopolitics Division of South America according to Golbery.

A strategic structure that draws a lot of attention from foreign countries to the Latin American bloc is the bioceanic corridor, which consists of 4 thousand kilometers of highways that cross the South American continent shown in Figure 2.

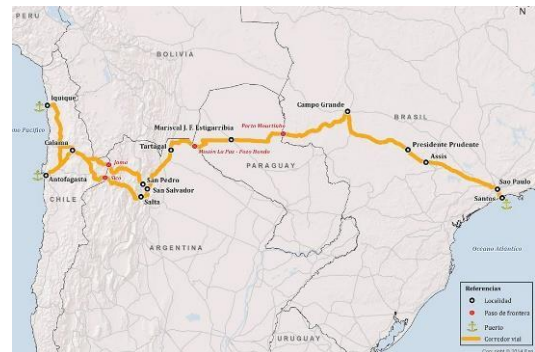


Figure 2. South America bioceanic corridor.

In 2016, the Chinese government contacted the Brazilian government with interest in making investments in a transoceanic railway similar to the oceanic corridor (Cardoso, 2016). This railway aimed to make the export of ores and grains to China cheaper.

The use of drones for tracking and defense is also essential for the protection of structures that are highly targeted internationally, such as these railways, as they play a central role in the economies of Latin American countries, with exports being a central part of economic development for most of these countries (Mikesell, 1962). A modern system of UAVs for protection and tracking of the main structures that move the country's economy is important

for the defense of these structures, it also guarantees geopolitical influence in countries abroad, as it shows the technological development of the countries that employ this technology. In addition, it gives a sense of credibility to transactions and cargo, both import and export, from countries with a modern drone technology surveillance system.

4. INFLUENCE OF DRONES FOR GEOPOLITICAL GROWTH

As discussed in sections 2 and 3, although Latin American countries appear peaceful at first glance, many factors, both current and old, can lead to an imbalance between them.

For countries outside of Latin America, it is possible to observe that those with higher development rates invest heavily in drone technology for the protection and surveillance of their country. According to (Gunaratne, 2013), the USA maintains drone bases in other countries such as Saudi Arabia after the September 11 attacks, to monitor possible terrorist attacks in their country. In Russia, there has been a huge investment in drones since 2009 according to (Luzin, 2023), and research into drones had already been underway since the 1960s. Currently, these Russian drones are constantly present in wars and operations in Syria and Ukraine.

According to (Dunn, 2023), it is estimated that Ukraine loses 10,000 drones per month in combat, as many of them are used in a “kamikaze” way to maximize their effects. These drones are cheap and easy to control, in addition to being immune to GPS blocking as cameras control them via tablets and are difficult to intercept by ships due to their small size. Because of this, drones have increasingly been considered fundamental parts of defense artillery. This is also noted by (Melkozerova, 2023), where the author explains how \$400 drones can destroy \$2M battle tanks. Despite being small, these drones can carry 2.5 kg of explosives at 150 km/h.

The use of military drones by developed countries, although not much talked about in general, occurs in considerable quantity. In Figure 3 taken from (Gunaratne, 2013), it is possible to observe the number of times that US drones were actively used in war in Pakistan.



Figure 3. Estimated number of people killed by US drones in war in Pakistan.

European countries that have not recently participated in wars also invest heavily in drone technology. In 2019, the Dutch parliament discussed and approved laws allowing its drones to be armed. According to Dorsey (2021), other countries such as Belgium and Poland already have approved agreements to acquire armed drones from the United States.

Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom have signed cooperation treaties for research into the future of aerial combat, with an emphasis on drones. Table 1, taken from Dorsey (2021), shows some European countries that have armed drones or drones that may be armed in the future.

Country	Class III capability	Planning future acquisition and/or involved in collaborative European/NATO R&D projects
Belgium	Unarmed	The US State Department approved the sale of four MQ-9B SkyGuardian drones to Belgium in March 2019. The MQ-9B can be armed, but there are currently no indications that this will be the case. ²⁶
France	Armed	Involved in the nEUROn, Euro MALE Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) and Future Combat Air System (FCAS) projects.
Germany	Germany obtained a nine-year leasing agreement to operate IAI Heron TP drones in 2018. The Heron TP has capability for carrying weapons. ²⁷	Involved in the Euro MALE RPAS and FCAS projects. Involved in NATO's acquisition of the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system.
Greece	Three-year lease agreement for two IAI Heron drones (unarmed) signed in 2020.	Greece announced its decision to buy a fleet of armed drones from the US and Israel in December 2019. ²⁸ It was reported in May 2020 that the country signed a deal with Israel to lease IAI Heron surveillance drones for border defence. ²⁹ Greece is involved in the nEUROn project.
Italy	Armament unknown ³⁰	Italy is involved in the nEUROn, Euro MALE RPAS and Tempest projects, and is one of the Allies participating in NATO's acquisition of the AGS system.

Table 1. European Drones

However, as explained by (Postma, 2019), these European drones have the main objective of managing crises, minimizing military and civil casualties, combating terrorism and consequently maintaining peace between countries.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This article presented reasons of why developing countries in Latin America need to invest in drones to develop strategically and economically. As an example, some successful European countries, in addition to the USA, that make heavy investments in this sector were presented, as well as government discussions with the aim of keeping their countries safer and more modern.

Even countries with a high level of development and no history of war in recent centuries have great interest and investment in this area, showing that countries that intend to develop must also urgently embrace these technologies. Latin American countries in general have goods and raw materials that are constantly exported and generate revenue for their countries and to give credibility and protection to these goods, investments in military drones are essential. According to the research carried out, Latin American countries that leave aside these investments will quickly become outdated and those that invest will certainly have a great reach of geopolitical power in the region.

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