

Trindade and Martim Vaz: Brazilian protection and projection in the South Atlantic

Trindade e Martim Vaz: proteção e projeção brasileira no Atlântico Sul

Trindade y Martim Vaz: protección y proyección brasileña en el Atlántico Sur

Trindade et Martim Vaz: protection et projection brésiliennes dans l'Atlantique Sud

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Abstract

The history of Brazil reveals a strategic relationship with the sea, fundamental since the colonial period and increasingly relevant today. In geopolitics, authors such as Therezinha de Castro and Golbery do Couto e Silva emphasized the centrality of the South Atlantic, shaping national strategic thought and consolidating the concept of the Strategic Environment. Building on this framework, the article seeks to understand how the strategic potential of Trindade and Martim Vaz can be leveraged to strengthen Brazilian maritime power, the defense of the Blue Amazon, and Brazil's international projection in the South Atlantic. The study advances the hypothesis that these islands can constitute the core of two complementary geopolitical zones: the Buffer Zone and the Trampoline Zone. The research adopts a qualitative approach, based on documentary analysis of specialized literature and national defense documents, complemented by interviews with members of the Brazilian Navy. The results indicate that the geopolitical classification of the oceanic islands highlights Trindade and Martim Vaz as strategic structuring points of the Brazilian presence in the South Atlantic, relevant to territorial protection and the projection of regional and global influence.

Keywords: Geopolitics; South Atlantic; Buffer Zone; Trampoline Zone.

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Resumo

A história do Brasil revela uma relação estratégica com o mar, fundamental desde o período colonial e cada vez mais relevante no contexto contemporâneo. No campo da geopolítica, autores como Therezinha de Castro e Golbery do Couto e Silva já destacavam a centralidade do Atlântico Sul, influenciando o pensamento estratégico nacional e a consolidação do conceito de Entorno Estratégico. Partindo desse referencial, o artigo tem como problema de pesquisa compreender como o potencial estratégico de Trindade e Martim Vaz pode ser instrumentalizado para fortalecer o poder marítimo brasileiro, a defesa da Amazônia Azul e a projeção internacional do país no Atlântico Sul. Sustenta-se a hipótese de que essas ilhas possuem potencial para se constituírem como o núcleo de duas zonas geopolíticas complementares, a Zona-Tampão e a Zona-Trampolim. A pesquisa adota abordagem qualitativa, baseada na análise documental da literatura especializada e de documentos de defesa nacional, complementada por entrevistas com membros da Marinha do Brasil. Os resultados indicam que a classificação geopolítica das ilhas oceânicas evidencia Trindade e Martim Vaz como pontos estratégicos estruturantes da presença brasileira no Atlântico Sul, relevantes tanto para a proteção territorial quanto para a projeção de influência regional e global.

Palavras-chave: geopolítica; Atlântico Sul; zona-tampão; zona-trampolim.

Resumen

La historia de Brasil revela una relación estratégica con el mar, presente desde el período colonial y cada vez más relevante en el contexto contemporáneo. En la geopolítica nacional, autores como Therezinha de Castro y Golbery do Couto e Silva destacaron la centralidad del Atlántico Sur, influyendo en el pensamiento estratégico brasileño y en la consolidación del concepto de Entorno Estratégico. Desde este marco, el artículo analiza cómo el potencial estratégico de Trindade y Martim Vaz puede fortalecer el poder marítimo brasileño, la defensa de la Amazonía Azul y la proyección internacional en el Atlántico Sur. Se sostiene la hipótesis de que estas islas pueden constituir el núcleo de dos zonas geopolíticas complementarias: la Zona Tampón y la Zona Trampolín. La investigación adopta un enfoque cualitativo, basado en análisis documental de literatura especializada y documentos de defensa nacional, complementado por entrevistas con miembros de la Marina de Brasil. Los resultados indican que Trindade y Martim Vaz constituyen puntos estratégicos de la presencia brasileña en el Atlántico Sur, relevantes para la protección territorial y la proyección de influencia regional y global.

Palabras clave: Geopolítica; Atlántico Sur; Zona Tampón; Zona Trampolín

Résumé

L'histoire du Brésil révèle une relation stratégique avec la mer, fondamentale depuis la période coloniale et de plus en plus pertinente dans le contexte contemporain. Dans le champ de la géopolitique, des auteurs tels que Therezinha de Castro et Golbery do Couto e Silva ont déjà souligné la centralité de l'Atlantique Sud, influençant la pensée stratégique nationale et la consolidation du concept d'Environnement Stratégique. À partir de ce cadre de référence, l'article pose comme problématique de recherche la compréhension de la manière dont le potentiel stratégique de Trindade et Martim Vaz peut être instrumentalisé afin de renforcer la puissance maritime brésilienne, la défense de l'Amazonie Bleue et la projection internationale dans l'Atlantique Sud. L'hypothèse soutenue est que ces îles présentent le potentiel de constituer le noyau de deux zones géopolitiques complémentaires: la Zone Tampon et la Zone Tremplin. La recherche adopte une approche qualitative, fondée sur l'analyse documentaire de la littérature spécialisée et de documents de défense nationale, complétée par des entretiens menés auprès de membres de la Marine brésilienne. Les résultats indiquent que la classification géopolitique des îles océaniques met en évidence Trindade et Martim Vaz comme des points stratégiques structurants de la présence brésilienne dans l'Atlantique Sud, pertinents tant pour la protection territoriale que pour la projection d'influence régionale et globale.

Mots-clés : Géopolitique ; Atlantique Sud ; Zone Tampon ; Zone Tremplin.

1 INTRODUCTION

Brazil's history reveals a strong dependence on, and concern with, the sea as a vector of development, even before the country's consolidation as an independent state. Today, this concern has become even more relevant, as Brazil has approximately 7,500 km of coastline and an ocean area of around 5.7 million km². In addition, the coastal zone is home to more than 50 million Brazilians – about 24% of the country's total population – while more than one thousand vessels transit national maritime routes every day. The South Atlantic also accounts for more than 90% of the oil and approximately 80% of the natural gas that make up the country's energy matrix (Barbosa, 2022; Reis, 2024).

In the field of geopolitics, the relevance of the South Atlantic to national interests has been emphasized by authors such as Therezinha de Castro (1986; 1999; 2021a; 2021b) and Golbery do Couto e Silva (1981), who made significant contributions to understanding how Brazil should orient its maritime engagement. These reflections helped consolidate the concept of the Strategic Environment, later incorporated into national defense planning. This notion

defines Brazil's priority area of action: a region where the country already exerts considerable political, economic, and military influence, and where it seeks to expand its presence through South-South Cooperation, thereby strengthening its position in the international arena (Brasil, 2020; Willrich, 2018).

With this in mind, this article seeks to analyze the strategic value of Trindade and Martim Vaz, considering their importance for the protection of the Brazilian coast and the Blue Amazon, as well as for strengthening the country's international projection. Based on this analysis, it proposes a geopolitical classification of Brazil's oceanic islands – Atol das Rocas, Fernando de Noronha, São Pedro and São Paulo, Martim Vaz, and Trindade – grounded in classical and contemporary theories of maritime power. This proposal gives rise to two zones, conceived on the basis of the literature adopted in this research and with Trindade and Martim Vaz as their central axis: the Buffer Zone, aimed at the security of the Blue Amazon and the continental territory; and the Trampoline Zone, which reflects Brazilian interests in the Strategic Environment and supports the expansion of the country's presence, especially in West Africa and Antarctica.

To this end, the article is structured into three sections: the first presents the methodology adopted in the research; the second discusses classical conceptions of maritime geopolitics and their influence on Brazilian strategy; and the third proposes a classification of Brazil's oceanic islands, detailing the Buffer and the Trampoline Zones.

The results of the analysis developed in this study indicate that Trindade and Martim Vaz, particularly Trindade Island, occupy a strategic position near areas of relevance to Brazil. This position gives them significant geopolitical and geostrategic value. The islands contribute to strengthening territorial control, enabling the exploitation of marine resources, expanding relations with other South Atlantic countries, and providing logistical support for military operations, thereby serving simultaneously as a space of protection and projection for the country.

2 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

At the outset, it should be noted that this is a qualitative study. Accordingly, an investigation based on indirect documentation was necessary in order to identify what may be referred to as source material, as a starting point for the scientific inquiry (Marconi; Lakatos, 2003).

Equally relevant was the documentary analysis (Roche, 2012), which covered national strategic documents such as the Brazilian Navy Strategic Plan 2040 (PEM 2040), the National Defense Strategy (END), the National Defense Policy (PND), and the National Defense White Paper (LBDN).¹

In addition, six interviews were conducted with the following interlocutors: Admiral Fernando Garcez (Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf — CLPC), Commander Raphael Rangel (manager of the Trindade Island Research Program), Commander Guilherme Santos (Ocean Patrol Vessel “APA”), Commander Mauro Medeiros (Brazilian Navy Technological Center in Rio de Janeiro), Commander João Franswilliam (Ministry of Defense), Professor Anderson Santos (Rio de Janeiro State University), and an officer responsible for the management of Trindade Island, who chose to remain anonymous. These exchanges aimed to deepen the understanding of the institution’s operations in the Blue Amazon, as well as to examine their implications for the security and preservation of this strategic territory.

The interviews were recorded in two ways: the first involved recording, transcription, and field notes; the second relied exclusively on written records of the information collected. These data were subsequently analyzed and incorporated into the research. Most of the interviews were conducted during fieldwork (Azevedo; Ribeiro, 2024) carried out in partnership with the Brazilian Navy aboard the Ocean Patrol Vessel “APA” and on Trindade Island between October 17 and 26, 2024. Some interviews were recorded, while for others the information was collected through written notes. This differentiated approach was adopted because, at the time of the interviews, note-taking was deemed more effective in ensuring the willingness of certain interviewees to answer the questions.²

The fieldwork also employed the observational method, following three stages, “which consists of a path that would begin with descriptive observation and move toward selective observation, passing through focused observation” (Azevedo; Ribeiro, 2024, p. 14).

3 BRAZILIAN MARITIME GEOPOLITICS

Although this section focuses on Brazilian authors who addressed the geopolitics of oceanic spaces, it is worth highlighting the contribution of Alfred Mahan (1891) and his theory

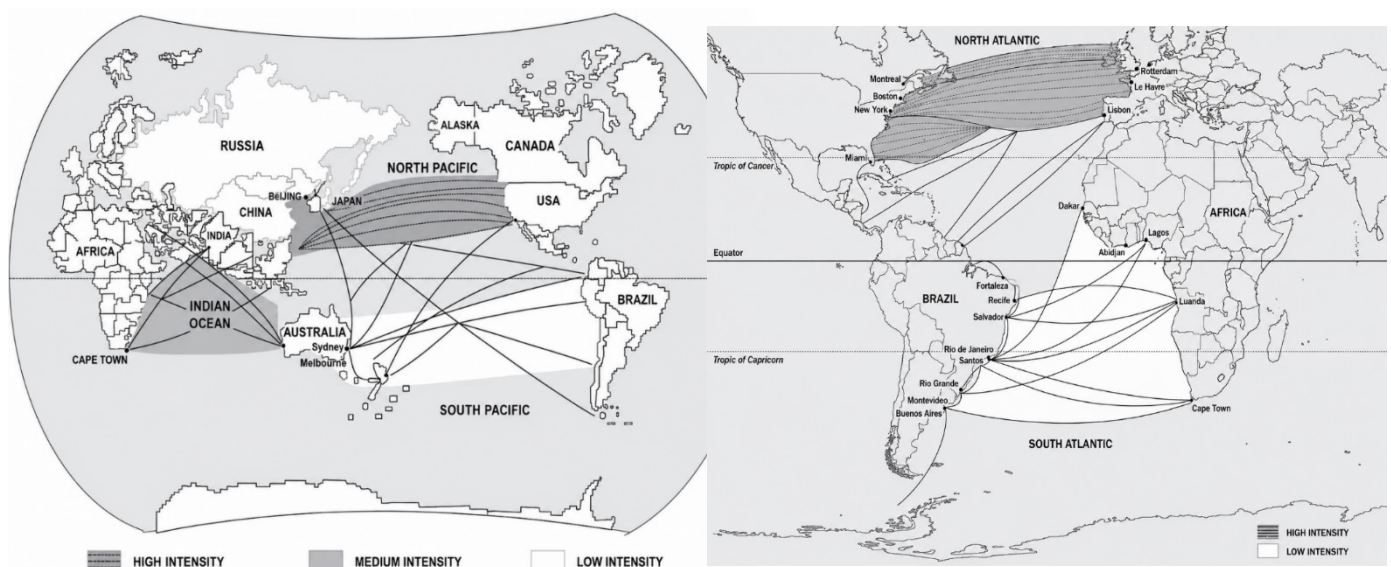
¹ Unlike the other documents, the National Defense White Paper does not define defense policies but rather sets them out and communicates them; nevertheless, it was included in this research because it brings together relevant information and covers aspects addressed in other documents.

² It is important to note that all interviews reflect exclusively the personal opinions and perspectives of the interviewees and do not necessarily represent the official position of the institutions with which they are affiliated.

of maritime power, which continues to exert significant influence in this field and directly inspired several works in Brazil. However, as this is not the main scope of the present study, particular attention should be given to the analyses by Kennedy (1988), Baracuh (2021), and Cruz and Sousa (2023), who examined this theory with depth and rigor.

The geographer Therezinha de Castro (1930–2000) is regarded as a key reference in studies on the geopolitics of the seas. In works such as *Geopolítica: princípios, meios e fins*,³ she emphasized the strategic importance of the South Atlantic for hemispheric security and Brazil's development (Penha, 2008). Her most significant contribution was the concept of *oceanopolitics* (Castro, 2021b), understood as geopolitics applied to maritime spaces from the perspective of “world power.” Building on this idea, Castro proposed the existence of five “pivot areas” and ocean basins: Brazil, in the South Atlantic; India, in the Indian Ocean; the United States, in the North Atlantic and North Pacific; China, in the North Pacific; and Russia, in the Arctic.

Figures 1 and 2 – Ocean Basins and Pivot Areas



Source: adapted from Penha, 2010.

Figures 1 and 2 show that the basins present different levels of intensity, defined by the geopolitical, economic, and military relations among their actors. Drawing on Therezinha de Castro, Eli Penha (2010) emphasizes that only the North Atlantic and the North Pacific have high-intensity connections. The South Atlantic, by contrast, which encompasses much of

³ Translator's note: A possible English rendering of the title is *Geopolitics: Principles, Means, and Ends*.

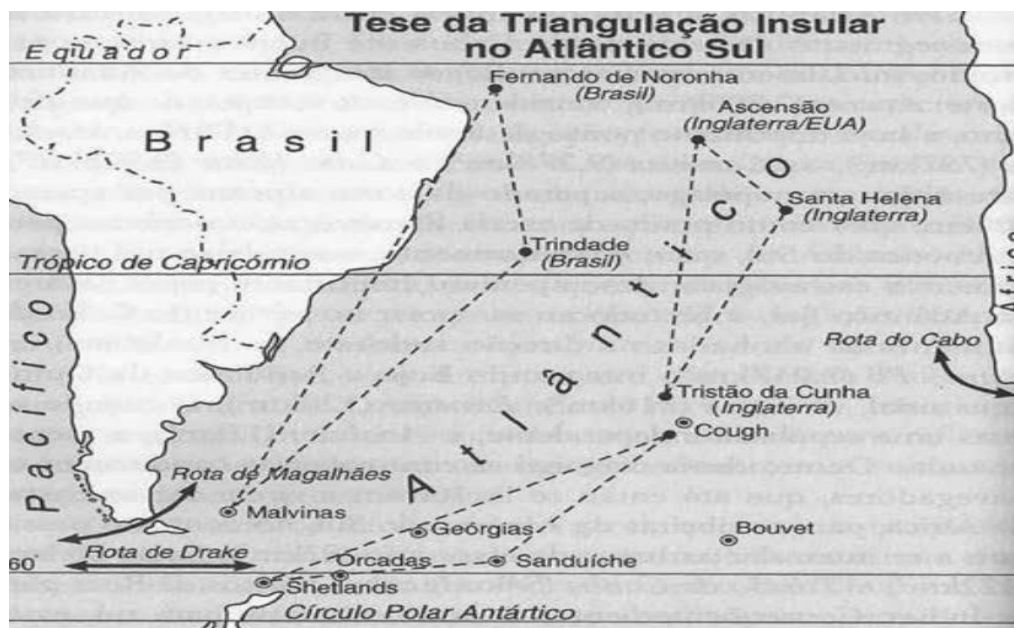
Brazil's current Strategic Environment, maintains low-intensity connections, highlighting the need to strengthen relations among the countries of this region.

Castro argued that, in the contemporary period, maritime power underwent a change in purpose: it was no longer tied primarily to direct armed conflict between rivals but instead came to operate as a tool for threatening strategic points and as a deterrent force. She further states that:

Nations seek to obtain Military Power at sea in order to acquire or increase their share of ocean resources. And if, in the past, the protection of fishing zones was a secondary issue for Navies, today the awareness that the seas are vital sources of food, energy, and industrial raw materials has contributed to changing the conception of the utility of Maritime Power within the geopolitical approach (Castro, 2021a, p. 40).

Another relevant contribution by Castro (1999) is the thesis of insular triangulation, which identifies three geostrategic triangles in the South Atlantic (Figure 3). The first, formed by Ascension, Saint Helena, and Tristan da Cunha, and the second, by Gough, the South Shetland Islands, and the South Sandwich Islands, ensure influence and security for the United Kingdom and NATO in the region, as well as support for routes such as the Cape Route. The third triangle, composed of Fernando de Noronha, Trindade Island, and the Falkland Islands, should be further explored, as it has the potential to function as a set of forward posts for Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay.

Figure 3 – Insular Triangulation Thesis



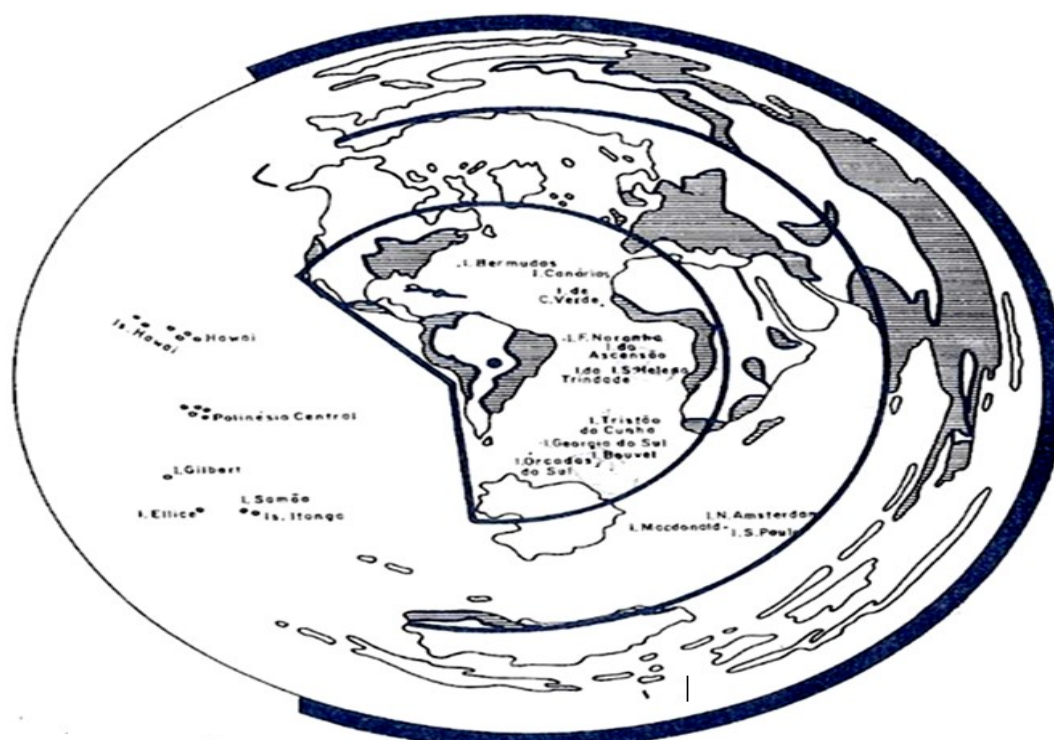
Source: Castro, 1999.

For Castro, these triangles formed by the belts of British islands in the South Atlantic give the United Kingdom a unique geopolitical and strategic advantage in controlling the region and in establishing an asymmetry of maritime power between London and the South American countries.

It is also important to highlight the emphasis Castro placed on the strategic importance of the northeastern salient in Brazilian geopolitics (Castro, 1999). According to Souza and Visentini (2023), Therezinha de Castro regarded this region as crucial because it enabled the Natal-Dakar route,⁴ a geopolitical landmark of the South Atlantic for both maritime and air power. This route, together with Trindade Island, Fernando de Noronha, and the Falkland Islands, makes possible a tri-continental strategic articulation – America, Africa, and Antarctica – favoring the triangulation of navigation within the geopolitical space of the South Atlantic (Castro, 1986; 1999). Novaes and Lamego (2025) argue that the ideas and maps developed by Therezinha de Castro throughout her work exerted a profound influence on Brazilian geopolitical thought regarding the seas.

General Golbery do Couto e Silva (1911–1987) was another major thinker in Brazilian maritime geopolitics. In *Geopolítica do Brasil* (1981), he presented the “hemicycles thesis,” which influenced the country’s foreign and defense policies (Salatino et al., 2021). According to him, Brazil has two zones of power projection: the outer hemicycle and the inner hemicycle. The former, referred to as the “expanded security perimeter,” extended from the Pacific to the western coast of Africa and was not to be treated as a priority. The latter encompassed the entire Atlantic region, where Brazil should invest in defense and diplomacy in order to expand its influence.

⁴Souza and Visentini (2023) argue that “in this ‘tri-continental’ system, the strategic line between Natal and Dakar is, as already pointed out by other Brazilian geopoliticians, the dividing line between the North and South Atlantic, even though NATO understands it to be the Tropic of Cancer.”

Figure 4 – Brazil and the Inner and Outer Hemicycles

Source: Silva, 1981.

Teixeira Junior (2013) argues that, although Couto e Silva's theory was developed in the context of the Cold War, his reflections remain relevant, since the logic of gaining security and influence – and, consequently, maritime power – remains similar. Moreover, the spatial delimitation of Brazil's area of action in the fields of Defense and Security proposed by Golbery unequivocally inspired what would later be understood as Brazil's current Strategic Environment.

Golbery do Couto e Silva (1981) also argued that Brazilian geography, marked by an extensive hydrographic network, favors the integration of the Atlantic with the country's interior, expanding its influence over the continent and strengthening internal circulation. For him, this configuration reinforced national development and Brazil's projection as a global power. The author also emphasized that the Brazilian coast and the northeastern promontory gave the country a "near monopoly of dominance in the South Atlantic" (Silva, 1981, p. 52), reinforcing the strategic dependence on the maritime strip, where the main South American centers of power are concentrated. In this context, Couto e Silva defended the maintenance of naval and air bases in the South Atlantic as a condition for national security and survival.

These ideas, like those of Therezinha de Castro, remain influential in Brazilian geopolitics and continue to rank among the most recurrent references in national academic production (Oliveira; Azevedo, 2025). According to Oliveira and Azevedo (2025), this legacy

produces two main effects: on the one hand, it reaffirms the centrality of the South Atlantic to Brazil's sovereignty and international projection; on the other, it may limit the advancement of studies by keeping the debate excessively tied to established authors and already consolidated ideas. This scenario has apparently reduced the field's capacity for thematic renewal in recent years and has made it more difficult to adapt to contemporary transformations. The authors also emphasize the need for future research to propose ideas and concepts that move beyond classical frameworks, in order to address the gaps currently found in national geopolitical production.

Thus, these authors' contributions help explain the need for Brazil to approach the sea as a strategic space. Based on them, it becomes possible to reflect on new ways of using key regions – especially islands – to strengthen Brazil's presence in the South Atlantic, protect its territories, and advance its geopolitical interests.

4 THE “GEOPOLITICAL CLASSIFICATION” OF BRAZILIAN OCEANIC ISLANDS

Concern with territorial sovereignty and the projection of power through the sea is part of the strategies of the Brazilian state, especially in the context of the request to expand the Continental Shelf. As Barbosa (2022, p. 9) emphasizes, “Brazil, a country whose land borders are well defined and pacified, cannot make the same claim regarding its maritime border.”

In this context, island territories have become increasingly relevant to global geopolitics and, in particular, to Brazilian geopolitics. Their main functions include strengthening defense, providing logistical support, and enabling strategic monitoring. As Aquino (2019, p. 172) observes, islands provide the state with an “advanced and permanent presence in the strategic environment of its territory,” ensuring support for naval forces through supply, maintenance, and assistance in emergency operations. They also enable the installation of sensors, military bases, piers, and runways, thereby consolidating their role as key points for the projection of power in the South Atlantic. The importance of these territories is widely discussed by Aquino (2019) and Scott (2021). More recently, Soares and Azevedo (2025) have highlighted that contemporary academic production on the subject is concentrated mainly in regions of territorial disputes involving islands.

Although all Brazilian oceanic islands are strategically relevant, especially after the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), this study proposes a geopolitical classification based on specifically defined analytical criteria, such as territorial extent, physical characteristics, geographic location, and environmental and scientific potential.

These criteria, summarized in the table that systematizes the classification (Table 1), are inspired by classical and contemporary literature on maritime power, particularly the contributions of Mahan (1891) and Till (2018), which emphasize the relevance of elements such as territorial characteristics, the presence of bases and ports, and strategic position in relation to the coast and to areas of state interest, all of which are fundamental to consolidating Brazilian maritime power.

With regard to contemporary maritime power, the criteria adopted consider the intrinsic characteristics of oceanic islands, especially their insular ecosystems, marked by high biodiversity and the presence of endemic species of fauna and flora, which gives them scientific and environmental relevance within the state's maritime geopolitics. Thus, according to the parameters used in the classification and presented in the summary table mentioned above, islands with greater territorial extent, environmental and physical conditions favorable to the establishment of infrastructure – such as bases, ports, and airports – and a strategic location in relation to the continent and to points of national interest are considered to have greater strategic potential in the field of oceanopolitics.

Of the five oceanic islands under Brazilian sovereignty (Figure 5), only three are currently occupied: São Pedro and São Paulo, Fernando de Noronha, and Trindade Island. These islands primarily perform an environmental function aimed at protecting local ecosystems; however, their occupation also secures the right to the 200 NM Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) associated with each of them, while also providing logistical support for navigation in the region.

Figure 5 – Brazilian Oceanic Islands



Source: Almeida, 2006.

Among these islands, Fernando de Noronha and Trindade Island stand out (Table 1). With approximate areas of 26 km² and 10 km², respectively, both have physical conditions favorable to the installation of bases, ports, and airports, as well as strategic locations in relation to the Brazilian coast, the African continent, and United Kingdom island territories, such as Ascension Island. Even so, Trindade Island assumes greater strategic relevance because of its geological and geomorphological characteristics, which support Brazil's claim for the expansion of its continental shelf.

Table 1 – Criteria for the Geopolitical Classification of Islands

Islands		Atol das Rocas	Fernando de Noronha	São Pedro and São Paulo	Trindade Island	Martim Vaz
C r i t é r i a	Area (km ²)	5.5	26	0.01	10	0.4
	Feasibility of hosting logistical facilities	Not feasible	Feasible	Not feasible	Feasible	Not feasible
	Distance from the Brazilian coast	270 km	360 km	1000 km	1200 km	1200 km
	Distance from Africa	2700 km	2500 km	2000 km	4300 km	4300 km
	Possibility of expanding maritime boundaries	Does not allow	Does not allow	Does not allow	Allows	Allows
	Environmental and scientific potential	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present

Source: prepared by the authors.

Taking its characteristics into account, Trindade shows great potential as a geopolitical instrument, mainly because of its location at a central point along the Brazilian coast, as the easternmost national territory and the one closest to the middle of the South Atlantic. This perception was unanimously confirmed by the commanders interviewed, who emphasized the island's importance for the projection of Brazilian maritime power.

A notable feature – and the main difference between Trindade Island and the Martim Vaz Archipelago in relation to the other Brazilian islands – is the geopolitical advantage offered by their location far from the Brazilian coast. This position allows the country to fully exploit the 200-nautical-mile (NM) area delimited by the maritime boundaries established under UNCLOS, encompassing approximately 431,000 km² – an area comparable to the states of São Paulo and Paraná combined – since these boundaries do not overlap with the continental Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Their location, therefore, enables the definition of new territorial limits for the Brazilian state.

Moreover, due to their geological characteristics as part of the Vitória-Trindade Ridge (VTR), the islands have the potential to enable the integration of national maritime boundaries through the extended continental shelf. Their geological and geomorphological continuity with the continent provides scientific grounds that, under Article 76 of UNCLOS (ONU, 1982), qualify this region as an exception in the case of ridges,⁵ allowing expansion beyond 200 nautical miles.

Despite concerns regarding its volcanic origin and fragmented soil, Professor Anderson Costa stated in an interview that Trindade Island has full geological capacity to host logistical facilities, such as bases, ports, and airports. Commander Raphael Rangel noted that plans for such structures have existed since 1957 but were hindered by a lack of investment and environmental conflicts. Thus, the island's size and specific physical-geographical conditions reinforce its geopolitical importance, including in comparison with its nearest neighbor.

Trindade Island also stands out in contemporary maritime power because of its potential as a “natural laboratory,” owing to its unique insular characteristics and endemic species, which are relevant to scientific research and environmental preservation. It may also serve as an instrument of naval diplomacy (Till, 2018; Chiozzo, 2018). The construction of a military base and the constant presence of patrol vessels would expand Brazil's capacity to protect its territory, strengthen diplomatic ties, and ensure the security of commercial routes and search and rescue (SAR) areas, as argued by Reis (2024) and Neves (2015) when highlighting the strategic importance of military bases and naval presence on the country's oceanic islands.

Thus, Trindade Island and its maritime boundaries bring together elements of both classical and contemporary maritime power, combining defense and monitoring functions with scientific, environmental, and diplomatic dimensions. These factors position it as a strategic pillar of Brazilian maritime geopolitics, essential to consolidating sovereignty over the Blue Amazon and to expanding the country's presence in an area of growing global relevance, while also strengthening the development of partners in the Strategic Environment.

In this sense, the research highlights two main geopolitical roles of Trindade Island for Brazil: protection and projection, classical attributes supported by contemporary arguments. The analyses of its role as a central point of the Buffer and Trampoline Zones, discussed below,

⁵ In an interview, Admiral Garcez explained that, in general terms, the CLPC interprets the categories of ridges as follows: oceanic ridge, a formation disconnected from the continental margin; submarine ridge, connected to the margin by a bathymetric line, but without geological continuity; and submarine elevation, which presents both morphological and geological continuity, integrating the same formation as the continent. These different types of seabed elevations are subject to exceptions regarding the constraints on the limits of the continental shelf: for oceanic ridges, no exceptions apply to the constraint lines; for submarine ridges, the 350 NM constraint applies; whereas for submarine elevations, only the 2,500-meter isobath line applies.

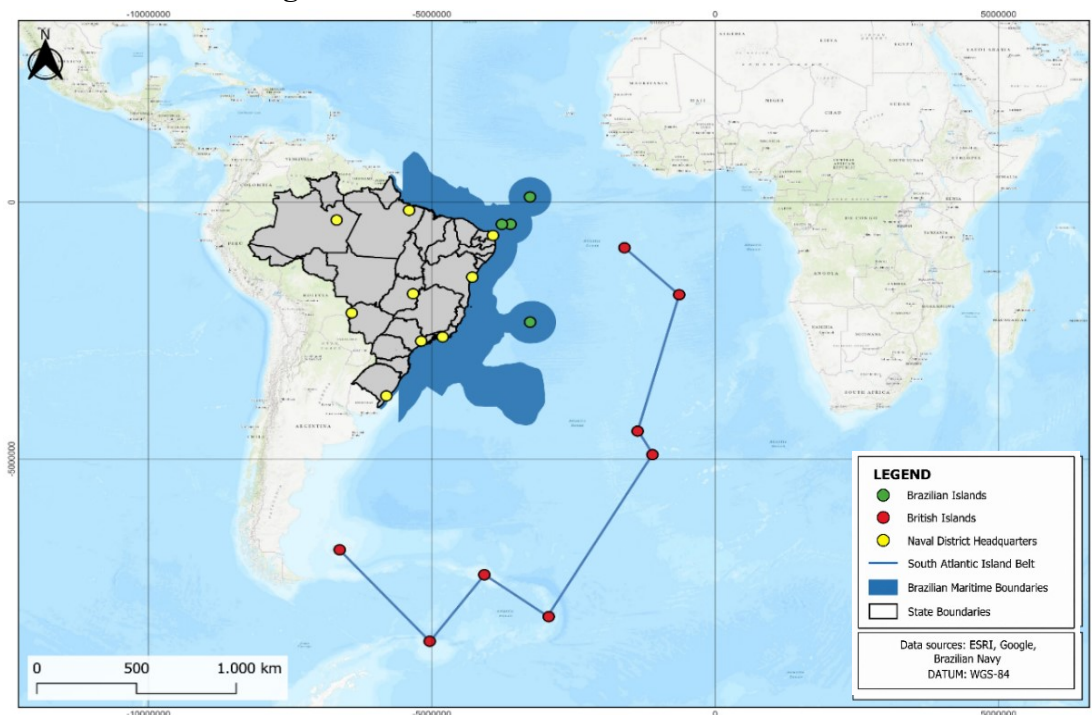
engage with Gottmann (2012), who defines territory as “shelter and opportunity,” as well as with the ideas of territoriality developed by Elden (2013) and Ferreira (2014). These reflections underscore the value Brazil assigns to strategic regions in relation to its national aspirations and to initiatives aimed at monitoring, expanding, and strengthening its presence in the Strategic Environment.

Buffer Zone: Brazilian Geopolitical Security in the South Atlantic

Although the South Atlantic has not historically been an area of intense conflict, Golbery do Couto e Silva (1981) had already emphasized the relevance of the Brazilian coast and the need to defend it. Today, this concern has become more pressing, considering that the coastal zone is home to more than 50 million Brazilians, that more than one thousand vessels transit national maritime routes every day, and that the sea provides more than 90% of the oil and around 80% of the natural gas that sustain the country’s energy matrix (Barbosa, 2022). In this scenario, the Brazilian state regards the protection of this area as even more crucial.

Another issue Brazil faces is competition from other maritime powers in the region, especially the United Kingdom (Figure 6), in the pursuit of geopolitical influence and control over this area. In this context, it is understood that “in patterns of power dispute among powers, their zones of influence are separated from one another” (Nohadani, 2020, p. 189).

Figure 6 – Belt of British Islands in the South

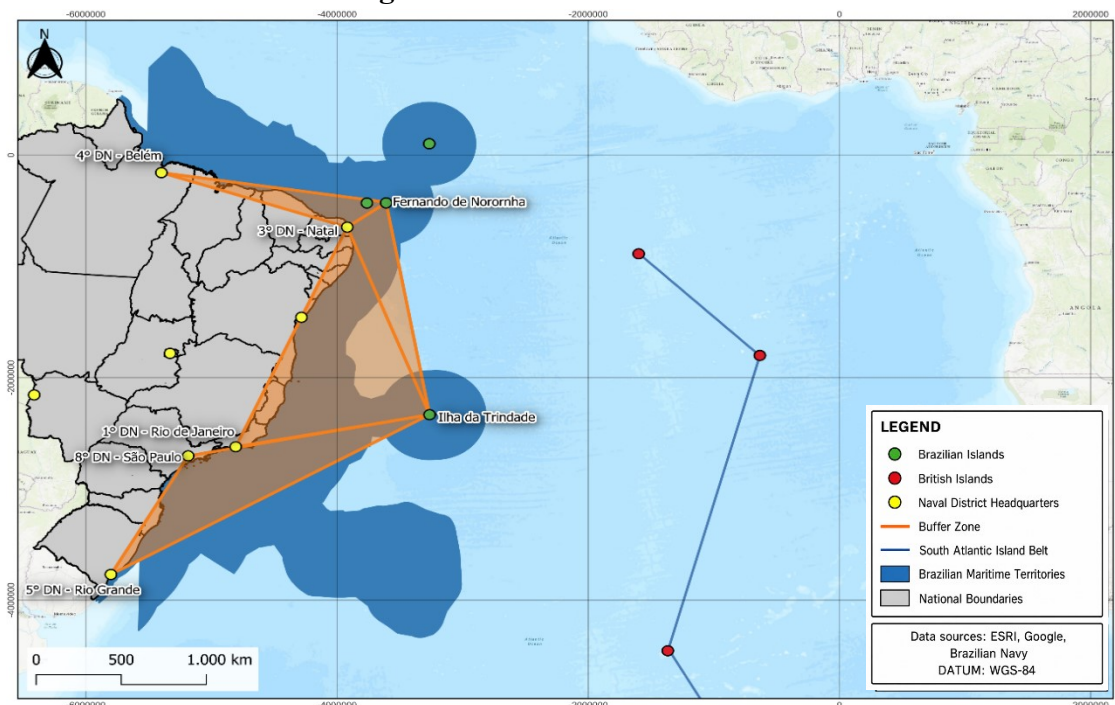


Source: prepared by the authors.

In geopolitical literature, buffer zones are traditionally understood as terrestrial areas, generally occupied by small neutral states with limited influence in the International System, used to establish a geopolitical balance and reduce conflict between two hostile powers (Wight, 1995; Turmanidze, 2009; Nohadani, 2020).

Building on this concept, this article proposes the notion of a Brazilian Buffer Zone in the South Atlantic (Figure 7), formulated on the basis of the literature analyzed and composed of four triangles connecting Trindade Island and Fernando de Noronha to the Naval Districts of Rio de Janeiro (1st), Natal (3rd), Belém (4th), Rio Grande (5th), and São Paulo (8th). Within the scope of national defense, this configuration would function as a strategic barrier, with the islands serving as forward posts to reduce risks to the continent and reinforce the Brazilian presence along the coast. It would also expand the capacity to monitor maritime routes and lines of communication in the central South Atlantic, with particular emphasis on Trindade's strategic role.

Figure 7 – Brazilian Buffer Zone



Source: prepared by the authors.

The representation of this zone through triangles evokes the classic strategy of triangulation, widely used in navigation and military operations. This method relies on reference points to determine precise positions or delimit areas of interest (Balzacq, 2014). Triangulation has also been the subject of important reflections in geopolitics, most notably in

the work of Therezinha de Castro, who developed the “Triangulation Thesis” and the “Insular Triangulation Thesis” in *Geopolítica: Princípios, Meios e Fins* (Castro, 1999).

It is also relevant to note that this analysis considers the multifaceted threats in the maritime environment described by Till (2018). These threats include disputes over resources, pollution, piracy, terrorism, trafficking, and sovereignty-related conflicts. These challenges were also mentioned by all the Brazilian Navy commanders interviewed as some of the main problems Brazil faces along its maritime borders.

Thus, it should be emphasized that classical authors of Brazilian geopolitics, such as Therezinha de Castro (1986; 1999; 2021a; 2021b) and Golbery do Couto e Silva (1981), had already attributed strategic importance to Trindade Island. This recognition is evident in theories such as the aforementioned Insular Triangulation Thesis (1999) and the Hemicycles Thesis (1981). Similarly, in the zone conceived in this analysis, Trindade’s potential to play a central role as a strategic forward post is reinforced, contributing to the country’s defense and development.

This Buffer Zone may be analyzed as a possible divider between the zones of influence of the two main maritime powers present in the South Atlantic: Brazil, anchored in its continental territory and oceanic islands, and the United Kingdom, supported by the belt of eight island territories located in the central and southern regions of the ocean. This configuration would help reduce the asymmetry of maritime power mentioned by Therezinha de Castro by limiting British reach and control over the southern portion of the Atlantic, especially in areas close to the American continent, thereby strengthening Brazil’s strategic position and expanding its capacity for sovereign action in the region.

The analysis highlights the strategic relevance of Trindade Island as one of Brazil’s main geopolitical points. Located in a central position along the coast, the island appears as the main vertex in three of the four strategic triangles, consolidating itself as a key element of national maritime geopolitics. The fieldwork revealed its high degree of militarization, in contrast to Fernando de Noronha. In the field of Defense, its location in the South Atlantic reinforces its role as a forward post for the protection of the continent and of resource-rich areas of the Blue Amazon. It is also directly connected to two crucial elements: the Rio Grande Rise and the boundaries of the Vitória-Trindade Ridge.

It is important to note that, despite the significant geoeconomic importance of the Rio Grande Rise and São Pedro and São Paulo, as well as their evident environmental relevance, both present limitations in terms of defense and strategic articulation. The absence of a land

territory capable of hosting the necessary infrastructure reduces their “geopolitical relevance” in comparison with Trindade and Fernando de Noronha.

The idea of this zone, linked to the stabilization of Brazil’s maritime boundaries, especially in areas of the continental shelf, combines strategic protection and legal security. However, the absence of sovereignty over the “corridor” separating the limits of the continent from Trindade and Martim Vaz — which remains under dispute with the CLPC (INEEP, 2025) — is a factor that would undermine the integrity of this spatial configuration, which is essential to ensuring the country’s capacity to protect its land territory and maritime spaces.

Moreover, an asymmetry can be observed between the classical and contemporary elements of maritime power in Brazil. The country faces shortcomings in traditional elements, especially in its “instruments of war.” The Brazilian Navy currently operates with limited resources, reflected in the reduced number of ships available to patrol and monitor the extensive area of the Blue Amazon, a challenge noted by the Minister of Defense, José Múcio Monteiro (Brasil, 2023), and by authors such as Reis (2024). This weakness in surveillance capacity is a factor that must be addressed for the possible implementation of the proposed Brazilian Buffer Zone.

Trampoline Zone: Brazilian Geopolitical Projection in the Strategic Environment

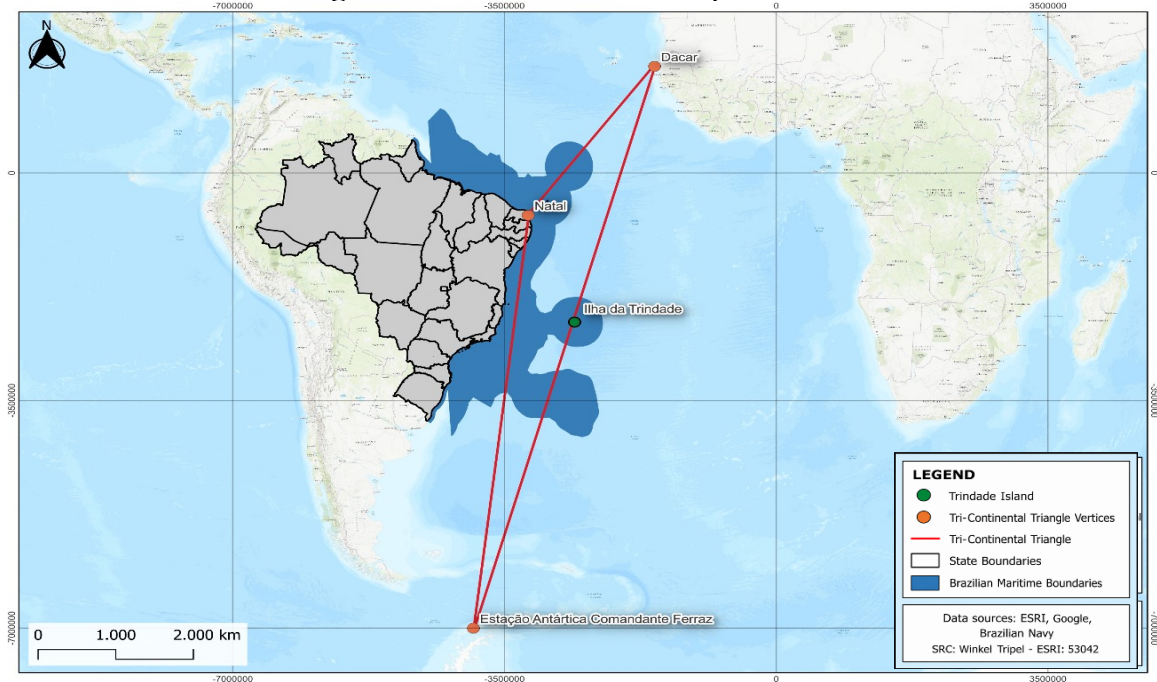
The concept of the Strategic Environment, as defined in Brazil’s defense documents (Brasil, 2008; 2012; 2013; 2016; 2020), encompasses the regions bordering the South Atlantic, where the country exercises political, economic, and military influence over the nations that make up this space. This area is regarded as a priority both for immediate action and for strengthening the Brazilian presence through South-South Cooperation, with the aim of expanding the country’s role and securing its place in the global sphere.

Accordingly, considering Brazil’s geopolitical ambitions in the land territories of the Strategic Environment — South America, Africa, and Antarctica — this study proposes the notion of a “Trampoline Zone” in the South Atlantic (Figure 8), inspired by the tricontinental articulation proposed by Therezinha de Castro (1999). This configuration would form a strategic triangle, with vertices located at key points for the national interests defined in the National Defense Strategy’s conception of the Strategic Environment (Brasil, 2008): the city of Natal, in the state of Rio Grande do Norte; Dakar, in Senegal; and Antarctica, represented on the map by the Comandante Ferraz Antarctic Station.

The choice of Natal and Dakar as vertices is grounded in the geopolitical importance of the Natal-Dakar Route, a strategic link between South America and Africa (Silva, 1981; Mattos, 1991; Castro, 1999; Souza; Visentini, 2023). The inclusion of the Senegalese capital reflects

Brazil's recent efforts — especially by the Navy — to strengthen ties with countries in northwestern Africa through naval diplomacy, by sending ships to support local navies and coast guards in protecting the South Atlantic and in promoting regional stability and socioeconomic development.⁶

Figure 8 – South Atlantic Trampoline Zone



Source: prepared by the authors.

This zone would constitute a strategy aimed at favoring the triangulation of navigation within the geopolitical space of the South Atlantic, intensifying connections within the ocean basin — in which Brazil stands out as a pivot area — and functioning as a “launching platform” to drive future development processes in the countries of the region. In the Brazilian case, such an arrangement would represent a relevant step forward in the country’s aforementioned aspiration to assert itself as the leading regional maritime power and as a global influence.

Considering the geopolitical context of the South Atlantic, a Brazilian military presence in foreign territories, unlike United States bases in the Pacific, is not part of the country’s strategy. However, as highlighted by Penha (2010), Alencastro (2019), Marcondes (2023), and Commander Guilherme Santos in an interview, Brazil seeks to strengthen relations with West Africa through soft power.⁷ Examples include the GUINEX operations and

⁶ Information taken from the Brazilian Navy News Agency website. Available at: <https://www.agencia.marinha.mil.br/defesa-naval/fragata-liberal-atraca-no-porto-de-dacar-no-senegal>; and <https://www.agencia.marinha.mil.br/internacional/navio-da-marinha-parte-rumo-ao-continente-africano-para-contribuir-com-seguranca>. Accessed on: Jan. 20, 2025.

⁷ The concept of soft power may be briefly understood as “[...] the ability of a country to make other countries want what it wants” (Nye, 2008, p. 94). Moreover, “a country’s soft power rests primarily on three resources:

participation in Obangame Express,⁸ which reinforce ties with African countries through naval diplomacy and cooperation in projects such as the survey of the continental shelf of Angola and Namibia (Leão et al., 2015).

The Trampoline Zone reflects the Brazilian state's view of the need to strengthen relations with South Atlantic countries through initiatives such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in the Americas, as well as the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) in Africa, with particular emphasis on the revitalization of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS). The objective is to expand geopolitical connections, especially with West Africa, a strategic region for increasing Brazil's international prestige. The zone also reinforces the Brazilian Antarctic Program (PROANTAR), functioning as a platform for expanding the country's diplomatic, economic, and military influence and leadership in Antarctica, where its presence remains limited.

It should be noted that Trindade, Martim Vaz, and their boundaries occupy a central position in the tri-continental triangle, giving particular prominence to Trindade Island as a potential forward post. This strategic location gives the island the prospect of becoming an articulator of operations linked to the zone and to the strengthening of cooperation on security and stability issues across multiple fronts, in alignment with the objectives set out in the aforementioned national strategic documents.

Thus, the unique characteristics of these oceanic islands, combined with their proximity to important maritime boundaries, such as those included in the claim concerning the Vitória-Trindade Ridge and the Rio Grande Rise, demonstrate their potential as a geopolitical instrument. The reflections presented here underscore the importance of these areas for maintaining territorial control, accessing and exploiting economic resources, conducting diplomacy with South Atlantic coastal states, and serving as bases for logistical support and military operations, returning to the understanding of territory as "shelter and opportunity."

its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)" (Nye, 2008, p. 96).

⁸ GUINEX operations consist of naval exercises conducted by the Brazilian Navy in the Gulf of Guinea, aimed at strengthening maritime cooperation, interoperability, and the capacity-building of African navies in addressing threats such as piracy, illicit trafficking, and other transnational crimes. Within the same scope, Brazil's participation in the multinational exercise Obangame Express is part of international efforts to promote maritime security in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Guinea, with a focus on protecting trade routes, monitoring maritime space, and improving search and rescue operations. Available at: <https://www.agencia.marinha.mil.br/defesa-naval/marinha-do-brasil-demonstra-capacidade-operativa-no-atlantico-sul>. Accessed on: May 2025.

However, the proposed Trampoline Zone faces considerable challenges, including pressure from external initiatives such as the Atlantic Basin⁹ and the Atlantic Centre,¹⁰ which threaten Brazilian protagonism in the dynamics of the South Atlantic. In addition, the absence of a well-defined and institutionally disseminated geopolitical strategy, combined with the lack of continuity in efforts to engage with African and South American countries across changes of government – issues addressed by Rafael (2023) and Marcondes (2023) – weakens Brazilian-led initiatives and limits the capacity to implement the zone proposed in this research.

5 CONCLUSION

This research aimed to analyze the strategic potential of Trindade and Martim Vaz as instruments for consolidating Brazil's maritime, strategic, and economic power. The analysis showed that the main oceanic islands under Brazilian sovereignty predominantly perform an environmental function aimed at protecting local ecosystems, but they also have the potential to assume a more significant geopolitical role by acting as vectors of territorial protection and national projection. In this sense, the study reinforces the centrality of oceanic and insular spaces in affirming the Brazilian presence in the South Atlantic, by articulating dimensions of sovereignty, security, and the expansion of influence in the global arena.

In this context, the geopolitical classification of oceanic islands proposed in this article makes it possible to show that Trindade, Martim Vaz, and their respective maritime boundaries emerge as fundamental strategic points for sustaining Brazil's aspirations in the oceanic space that surrounds it. Based on this analytical framework, it becomes possible to confirm the initial hypothesis that these territories, in articulation with other points of interest in Brazilian geopolitics — such as the Naval Districts, Africa, and Antarctica — have the potential to shape a broad domain within and beyond the Blue Amazon.

The proposals of the Buffer Zone and the Trampoline Zone, formulated throughout this research, demonstrate the relevance of the approach adopted by articulating the contemporary Brazilian geopolitical context with classical foundations of geopolitics and maritime power.

⁹ The Atlantic Basin initiative refers to a set of diplomatic, strategic, and cooperative efforts, led by the United States, aimed at promoting security, stability, and sustainable development in the Atlantic space, involving countries from the Americas, Africa, and Europe. Available at: <https://www.telanon.info/destaques/2022/08/12/38197/eua-envolvem-stp-na-iniciativa-de-defesa-da-bacia-atlantica/>. Accessed on: February 2025.

¹⁰ The Atlantic Centre emerges as a platform for strategic dialogue and knowledge production, proposed by Portugal, dedicated to fostering multilateral cooperation in the Atlantic, integrating security, blue economy, and environmental agendas, and supporting the formulation of common policies and strategies among the states of the Atlantic basin. Available at: <https://www.defesa.gov.pt/pt/pdefesa/ac/about>. Accessed on: February 2025.

Although they are not presented as normative models or immediate operational guidelines, these analytical categories deliberately assume a provocative and propositional character, offering new interpretive frameworks for understanding the role of oceanic islands and the South Atlantic in national strategy. In this sense, they constitute conceptual contributions intended to stimulate future reflection and broaden the debate on Brazil's possible courses of action in the South Atlantic space.

Finally, this study also sought to contribute to the strengthening of maritime geopolitics studies in Brazil, a field still little explored within civilian academia, particularly in Geography, despite its recurrent relevance in the military sphere. The incorporation of interviews with Navy officers and the analysis of documents and articles produced by the Armed Forces favored rapprochement between these fields of knowledge production, while also deepening the theoretical dialogue with classical authors such as Alfred Mahan, Therezinha de Castro, and Golbery do Couto e Silva. Based on this dialogue, the study reinforces the need to reinterpret oceanic and insular spaces in light of contemporary dynamics, recognizing the South Atlantic as a central strategic space of increasing relevance to Brazil in the twenty-first century.

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