

Maritime governance and security: brief considerations on COMPAAz and its interagency dynamics

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Executive Summary

Maritime governance and security extend beyond the ocean space and directly affect a country's economy, environment, society, and critical infrastructure. In Brazil, whose dependence on the sea is strategic — with maritime routes accounting for more than 95% of foreign trade, 95% of oil production, 80% of natural gas production, and 45% of fish production — the maritime domain is vital to national interests. Transnational threats and illicit activities originating in this domain require agile, coordinated, and interinstitutional responses that move beyond traditional models of state action. In this context, the creation of the Maritime Operations and Blue Amazon Protection Command (COMPAAz) stands out. Led by the Brazilian Navy and involving seven other state bodies and agencies, COMPAAz is an interagency arrangement inspired by successful international models. Its purpose is to strengthen coordination and expand the Brazilian state's response capacity in the face of maritime challenges. This paper analyzes the structure and performance of COMPAAz through documentary and bibliographic research, drawing on frameworks related to governance, security, and interagency relations. It examines: (i) the concepts and challenges of maritime governance and security, with emphasis on the Brazilian context; (ii) COMPAAz's institutional trajectory and organizational design; and (iii) critical reflections on its advances and limitations. The study concludes that COMPAAz represents an important step toward a more cooperative and integrated maritime security architecture, although structural weaknesses still limit its institutional role. It also offers recommendations to help overcome these challenges.

Keywords: governance; maritime security; COMPAAz; interagency dynamics.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of governance, particularly when linked to maritime security, extends well beyond the ocean space, affecting territory, critical infrastructure, the economy, the environment, and society as a whole. This spillover occurs even in the absence of specific threats, since maritime, economic, political, logistical, and environmental dynamics are structurally connected to land-based spaces. The range of transnational threats and illicit activities originating in the maritime domain makes the issue even more urgent, increasing the need for integrated, rapid, and technically sophisticated responses.

Contemporary maritime space has therefore become a strategic domain whose challenges exceed traditional models of state action and require complex coordination among multiple institutional actors, levels of government, and international bodies.

Maritime governance and security should occupy a central place on security agendas, especially in countries with extensive maritime areas under their jurisdiction, such as Brazil. For Brazil, the sea is vital to national interests: around 95% of oil, 80% of natural gas, and 45% of fish production come from it, and more than 95% of Brazilian foreign trade flows through it (Brasil, n.d.).

Brazil's still modest recognition of the sea's strategic importance has nevertheless encouraged initiatives aimed at addressing structural weaknesses in maritime governance and security. One example is the creation of COMPAAz, under the command of the Brazilian Navy and with the participation of seven other Brazilian state bodies and agencies.

The challenges in the maritime environment remain substantial, but COMPAAz may become an important step toward a more cooperative maritime security architecture. Its interagency approach has the potential to integrate state capabilities at both the national and international levels and to improve Brazil's capacity to respond to problems originating in the maritime space.

With this in mind, this study analyzes COMPAAz and its interagency structure. It is based on documentary and bibliographic research and draws on specialized literature on governance, security, maritime security, and interagency relations, which provided the theoretical framework for the analysis.

The discussion first addresses concepts related to governance and security, especially in their maritime dimension, connecting them to the Brazilian context and its associated challenges. It then examines COMPAAz's institutional trajectory and organizational design, highlighting its interagency character and its inspiration in the U.S. model of maritime

operations. Finally, it offers critical reflections on the progress achieved so far, and on the limitations still observed in this new institutional arrangement.

The analysis begins with the concepts, challenges, and features of the Brazilian context related to maritime governance and security.

2 MARITIME GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY: CONCEPTS, CHALLENGES, AND THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

Pierre and Peters (2000) define governance as a set of formal and informal mechanisms, processes, and institutions that enable coordinated action among state and non-state actors in decision-making and in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

This requires the alignment of different interests, cooperation across levels and sectors, and regulatory capacity in settings marked by high institutional complexity and multiple actors, making governance itself a complex undertaking.

Governance should not be confused with government action (Duarte; Moura, 2019). While government refers to a central authority endowed with formal legitimacy, governance involves collaborative arrangements, whether formal or informal, among different actors, with or without the direct participation of state institutions (Pierre; Peters, 2000). Governance is therefore more fluid and less hierarchical than purely state-based arrangements.

In the maritime context, governance can be defined as

the process through which actors, usually national governments and their populations, as well as private, non-governmental, and international entities, interact to regulate maritime activities and exercise control over the maritime domain” (DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, 2023, p. 3).

This dynamic is therefore highly complex, given the diversity of interests, competencies, and scales involved. In the Brazilian context, it faces additional obstacles.

Brazil still lacks a consolidated governance culture, which hampers the formulation, implementation, and continuity of organized, effective public policies. This problem is not limited to maritime governance; it has become a recurring pattern across several areas of the state, whose fragility may even compromise national security (Figueiredo; Mendes, 2024).

This problem is particularly evident in the management of maritime space, which is marked by institutional and structural obstacles (Duarte, 2022). These constraints may undermine the effectiveness of security-related action in this domain, since governance, as Duarte and Moura (2019) argue, is an indispensable condition for maritime security.

This relationship shows how governance challenges shape both the conceptualization and the operationalization of security in the maritime domain, while also linking the discussion to a broader debate on the concept of security itself.

In this debate, the recurrent use of security arguments to justify different forms of state action reveals the range of meanings attached to the concept and directly influences how security dynamics are conceived and interpreted, both as a field of study and in everyday practice (Klein, 2011).

In general terms, security is associated with a sense of protection, stability, or reassurance in the face of risks and threats that may negatively affect individuals, institutions, or strategic assets (Medeiros Filho, 2018). From this perspective, it is directly linked to the capacity to reduce risks, identify threats, and preserve the stability and functioning of a given system (Cepik, 2001).

As Buzan and Hansen (2012, p. 37) argue, security is a “hyphenated concept”, whose full meaning depends on its connection to a specific referent object. In this paper, that object is the contemporary and complex maritime space of the twenty-first century.

According to Klein (2011), understanding maritime security requires a critical examination of the theoretical and operational foundations that structure the concept of security within International Relations, in connection with the broadening of security-related interests and their implications for the maritime domain.

Klein (2011) cites human security as one example of this broader approach, as it has gained prominence in security debates by focusing on the protection of individual needs rather than only on the traditional security requirements of the state. Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde (1998) also stress this broader perspective, noting that threats to state security are not limited to the military sphere and may also be political, economic, social, and environmental in nature.

Within this expanded understanding of security, state interests come to be seen as efforts to reduce vulnerability to external forces that may affect domestic decision-making autonomy, collective values, and governance.

Maritime security, therefore, is no longer confined to traditional views of sea power. These views emphasized control of the seas through naval superiority, the development of

maritime trade with overseas colonies, and privileged access to international markets — elements regarded as foundations of national prosperity and prestige (Mahan, 2012). Maritime security now encompasses a wider set of actions aimed at addressing diverse threats (Klein, 2011), many of which go beyond the classic response logic centered on the use of naval power to protect national interests.

The most representative formulation of this traditional and narrower perspective is Mahan's (2012) concept of "command of the sea", according to which maritime security lies in the ability of a naval power to dominate major sea routes and prevent adversaries from using the sea for military or commercial purposes.

Today, maritime security has expanded into an umbrella concept, covering a broad spectrum of threats, risks, and challenges in the maritime domain and bringing together military, economic, environmental, human, and criminal dimensions (Bueger; Edmunds, 2024). This broadening reflects the incorporation of maritime governance perspectives, which call for a more inclusive approach to the creation and application of rules and regulations guiding the safe and sustainable use of the sea. It also reflects coordinated action among state and non-state actors around a shared set of rules (Duarte; Moura, 2019), aimed at ensuring good order at sea (Till, 2009, p. 286), understood as the maintenance of order, predictability, and stability in maritime space.

Operationally, maritime security depends on the capacity to conduct patrol, surveillance, and, above all, response activities in order to enforce national and international law in the ocean environment (Bateman, 2016). This practice is directly related to Klein's (2011) definition, according to which maritime security involves the protection of maritime and land territory, as well as infrastructure, the economy, the environment, and society, against illicit acts committed at sea but with effects on land.

Beyond theoretical and conceptual formulations, making security effective at sea remains a considerable challenge, especially for states marked by structural distortions in their formation (Hui, 2005). This is the case of many Latin American countries, where institutional weaknesses continue to hinder the implementation of effective mechanisms for regulating and controlling maritime activities.

In the Brazilian context, Duarte (2022, p. 324) identifies a "state of maritime insecurity in the South Atlantic", marked by persistent structural, institutional, and operational obstacles that hinder the formulation and implementation of broad and effective strategies. This situation weakens mechanisms of control and oversight in maritime space, creating room for the proliferation of illicit activities.

One indication of this problem is the gap of more than two decades between the original publication of Brazil's National Maritime Policy (PMN) in the 1990s (Brasil, 1994) and its most recent revision (Brasil, 2025). This interval reveals the difficulties faced by the Brazilian state in keeping pace with rapid changes in the maritime environment and suggests that the updated PMN represents a belated response to the new demands of contemporary maritime security.

Current challenges require more than deterrence and control capabilities. They call for an integrated approach that places security and governance at the core of the formulation, coordination, and implementation of public policies aimed at the sustainable use and protection of maritime spaces.

Against this backdrop of growing complexity and increasing demands, Brazil needs stronger institutional structures capable of pooling efforts and coordinating action in the maritime domain. The next section therefore examines COMPAAz as one of the new instruments of coordination in the national maritime environment.

3 COMPAAz: BRIEF HISTORY, INTERAGENCY ARCHITECTURE, AND INTEGRATION INTO MARITIME SECURITY NETWORKS

COMPAAz was officially activated by the Brazilian Navy on December 9, 2021 (Brasil, 2021), with the purpose of

contributing to the readiness and employment of the Naval, Aeronaval, and Marine Corps Forces subordinated to ComOpNav; to the safety and security of maritime and inland waterway traffic of interest to Brazil; to the development of **Maritime Security (SEGMAR)**; and to the development of Maritime Situational Awareness (MSA) (COMPAAz, n.d., n.p., emphasis added)

The new command structure emerged from the restructuring of the Integrated Maritime Security Center (CISMAR). Based on studies aimed at improving ComOpNav's organization, the restructuring recommended integrating that command's Deputy Chief of Operations with CISMAR, leading to a new configuration designed to optimize command and control in maritime operations (Marinha do Brasil, 2021).

The change sought to incorporate into the Brazilian context the concept of a Maritime Operations Center, inspired by the successful model used by the United States Navy and based on a six-activity cycle: 1) continuously assessing the effects of ongoing missions and operations; 2) determining which critical intelligence information is needed to achieve operational objectives; 3) planning in alignment with operational objectives and the mission;

4) ensuring that command has the information needed to accomplish operational and mission objectives; 5) establishing decision-making authority and delegating organizational authority for mission planning and execution; and 6) supervising and monitoring plan execution, assessing performance, and making adjustments as needed (Beaty *et al.*, 2009).

This initiative sought to align Brazil's structure with the demands of an increasingly dynamic and complex strategic environment, in which effective interagency coordination (Franca, 2022) and standardized operational procedures (Marinha do Brasil, 2021) have become essential. It also contributed to doctrinal updating grounded in a modern understanding of sea power (Silva; Santos, 2022).

COMPAAz's history, however, is not limited to its transformation from CISMAR's organizational structure. Its origins date back to the 1960s, with the creation of the Naval Command for Maritime Traffic Control (COMCONTRAN), whose main responsibility was to coordinate naval control of maritime traffic in waters under Brazilian jurisdiction. Initially, it focused on protecting maritime traffic through convoy formation, a doctrine inherited from the Second World War (1939–1945) and maintained during the Cold War. In that bipolar international setting, Soviet submarine attacks were seen as the main maritime threat to U.S. allies in maritime areas under Brazil's responsibility (Malafaia, 2019).

The transition from COMCONTRAN to CISMAR and, later, to COMPAAz reflected an adaptation process driven by the growing diversity of threats in the maritime environment. This shift required the Brazilian Navy to move beyond naval control of maritime traffic and develop closer links with other Brazilian state bodies (Franca, 2022).

Social demands had become so complex, diverse, and multidimensional that no single body or agency can address them alone (Garcia, 2014). Navies, likewise, are no longer the only institutions responsible for ensuring maritime security (Speller, 2019).

Stronger interagency relations therefore became essential to operational success (Figueiredo; Moreira, 2022), including in the maritime domain. COMPAAz was created with this purpose: an interagency center designed to coordinate efforts in the maritime. The center also hosts the pilot project for operating the Blue Amazon Management System (SisGAAz), whose purpose is to continuously improve maritime situational awareness and, as a result, security in this domain (Marinha do Brasil, 2021).

Its work is aimed at strengthening security in maritime areas of interest to Brazil, with emphasis on monitoring, control, and protection. The goal is to improve the capacity to conduct more accurate analysis of vessels displaying anomalous behavior, while also

promoting interoperability among the national bodies involved in maritime security (Franca, 2022).

By combining operational dynamism, expanded situational awareness, and rapid-response capacity across different contingencies, COMPAAz can support more precise action. This would not only increase agility in interpreting and sharing information (Silva; Santos, 2022), but also strengthen the conditions for making the best possible decision.

The center's current composition includes the Brazilian Navy as the central body, bringing together representatives from seven other Brazilian state bodies and agencies (Franca, 2022). These agencies are represented through liaison officers from the Federal Police (PF), the Federal Revenue Service of Brazil (RFB), the National Waterway Transportation Agency (ANTAQ), the Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency (ANVISA), the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama), the National Commission for Public Security in Ports, Terminals, and Waterways (CONPORTOS), and the *Chico Mendes* Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio).

The presence of these bodies within COMPAAz highlights the initiative's interagency character and its ability to pool efforts across different spheres of the state. Each institution contributes specific competencies to address different threats in the maritime environment, reflecting the diversity and complexity of contemporary security challenges in this domain. These range from federal illicit activities and health-related violations to environmental crimes and navigation risks, forming a broad spectrum of threats to be addressed (Franca, 2022; Silva; Santos, 2022).

Table 1 below lists these agencies, detailing their responsibilities and the main maritime threats with which they are associated.

Table 1 – Agencies Represented in COMPAAz, Their Maritime Security Roles, and Related Threats (continues)

Body/Agency	Role in COMPAAz	Related Threats
Federal Police (PF)	Combating federal crimes in the maritime environment.	Drug trafficking, terrorism, smuggling, illegal immigration, armed robbery.
Federal Revenue Service of Brazil (RFB)	Customs oversight and repression of tax-related illicit activities.	Tax and customs offences involving drugs, firearms, and counterfeiting.
National Waterway Transportation Agency (ANTAQ)	Regulation and oversight of waterway transport and port terminals.	Waterway navigation safety.
Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency (ANVISA)	Health inspection of vessels, cargo, and crews.	Infectious and contagious diseases.

Body/Agency	Role in COMPAAz	Related Threats
Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama)	Environmental monitoring and enforcement against environmental violations.	Environmental pollution, illegal fishing.
Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio)	Protection of marine protected areas and conservation units.	Illegal activities in environmental conservation units.
National Commission for Public Security in Ports, Terminals, and Waterways (CONPORTOS)	Coordination of public security actions in port facilities and waterways.	Port security

Source: prepared by the author (2025) based on Malafaia (2019), Franca (2022), and Silva and Santos (2022).

Alongside domestic interagency work, maritime security issues have become increasingly international, requiring Brazil to deepen ties with other countries and engage more actively in global maritime security networks, particularly in maritime traffic control (Malafaia, 2019).

The complementarity between national coordination and international cooperation initiatives seeks to improve surveillance, oversight, and incident-response capacity, while positioning Brazil more actively within regional and multilateral maritime security networks and dynamics (Silva; Santos, 2022).

In this regard, Namibia and Uruguay's accession to the LRIT (Long-Range Identification and Tracking) Regional Data Centre–Brazil stands out, as does the signing of cooperation agreements for information sharing with member countries of the Plan for the Coordination of the Defense of Inter-American Maritime Traffic (CODEFTRAMI), within the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS). Similar arrangements also involve the United States Coast Guard (USCG) (Malafaia, 2019) and the navies of Chile, Portugal, India, and Cameroon. Brazil also participates in the South Atlantic Maritime Area (AMAS), together with Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay (Franca, 2022).

Although COMPAAz represents an important institutional advance, its implementation is still under way, mainly because the functionalities planned for the full operation of SISGAAz have not yet been fully completed. Even so, the center has clear potential to significantly improve maritime security dynamics in Brazilian jurisdictional waters.

Overall, COMPAAz can be seen as a relevant initiative by the Brazilian Navy in adapting to contemporary maritime security requirements. Its interagency approach favors the combination of different state capabilities in response to today's complex and multifaceted threats.

Its design, inspired by the U.S. international model, together with its gradual integration into regional and international cooperation arrangements, reflects an institutional effort to expand surveillance, readiness, and response capacity in the maritime domain.

Despite the advances associated with its creation, significant challenges remain in governance and in the centrality of decision-making. These issues require a critical assessment of COMPAAz's institutional limitations and of its prospects for consolidation and strengthening, especially with regard to its position within the organizational structure of the Brazilian state.

COMPAAz is part of the ComOpNav hierarchy and is directly subordinate to the Navy Command, which in turn reports to the Ministry of Defense. In practice, this institutional position places the operational center at the fourth level of the federal administration, which may limit its leadership capacity and its ability to coordinate interagency action at broader and more strategic levels.

Considering these points, this paper has examined the concepts, challenges, and Brazilian context of maritime governance and security, focusing on the creation and structuring of COMPAAz. The analysis shows that, despite significant structural gaps in this field, the institutionalization of an interagency approach through COMPAAz represents an important effort to strengthen the coordination of state capabilities in response to contemporary maritime threats, which are inherently complex, multidimensional, and transnational.

The next section consolidates the main arguments presented above in the form of recommendations.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Consolidate COMPAAz as an integrating institutional structure, capable of providing surveillance, prevention, and response within a coordinated and cooperative environment** – this would help overcome the institutional fragmentation that currently limits the effectiveness of surveillance and incident response in the maritime domain. By bringing together, under a single structure, the monitoring, analysis, and action capabilities of the different agencies involved, Brazil would be able to build a more robust maritime situational awareness system, enabling earlier threat anticipation, better resource optimization, and faster decision-making. This integration would strengthen the national

capacity to provide security and good order at sea, in line with international practices in ocean governance;

- **Strengthen the interagency approach, expanding coordination among state capabilities in response to complex, multidimensional, and transnational maritime threats** – contemporary threats, such as illicit trafficking, marine pollution, cyberattacks, and sovereignty disputes, exceed the remit of any single institution. A stronger interagency approach would support information sharing, operational integration, and joint responses, increasing the state's ability to address complex and transnational risks more effectively;

- **Expand COMPAAz's participation in regional and international arrangements, using successful models as references to improve the Brazilian state's role in the maritime environment** – greater integration into international maritime security networks and forums would enable broader exchange of information, technologies, and best practices, strengthening Brazil's capacity to operate in a globalized and interdependent space. It could also increase Brazil's prominence in debates on ocean governance, the blue economy, and cooperative security, while helping align national practices with international maritime security standards;

- **Rethink COMPAAz's organizational arrangement, especially its institutional position at the fourth level of the federal administration and its subordination to ComOpNav, in order to expand its autonomy and institutional role** – the current organizational configuration limits COMPAAz's strategic potential by restricting its capacity for cross-cutting coordination and interministerial representation. Raising its institutional status and ensuring greater decision-making autonomy would help consolidate it as a higher-level coordinating body for maritime policy, with direct engagement at the strategic levels of the state. This reformulation could contribute to greater coherence across defense, security, and maritime development policies, while also facilitating dialogue with civilian and international partners;

- **Expand cooperation between civilian and military institutions, promoting greater multisectoral integration in maritime governance** – the complexity of contemporary maritime governance requires continuous interaction among the defense, environmental,

economic, scientific, transport, and public security sectors. Stronger civil-military cooperation would improve integrated sea management, reduce redundancies, and expand the reach of state action, especially in areas such as environmental monitoring, critical infrastructure protection, and the fight against illicit activities. This closer cooperation would also help consolidate a collaborative governance model in which the sea is understood as a strategic public good;

- **Strengthen interinstitutional coordination mechanisms, ensuring more integrated and effective decision-making processes** – the absence of stable coordination mechanisms tends to generate overlapping responsibilities, operational gaps, and slow decision-making. Strengthening these mechanisms through permanent committees, shared information systems, and joint response protocols would ensure synergy among the different bodies involved and provide greater predictability to government action. The adoption of robust interinstitutional governance practices would also support the achievement of “good order at sea” (Till, 2009, p. 286), which is essential to the stability and maritime security of the Brazilian state.

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