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## **Navigating Inter-Agency Collaboration and the Integration of Customs Security: Insights from the Brazilian case**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the collaborative dynamics among armed forces and law enforcement agencies, as police departments and customs, emphasising their integral role in fortifying maritime borders and countering transnational threats through inter-agency and civil-military cooperation. With a focal lens on the Global South perspective, anchored in Brazil's experience, a neo-institutional framework is employed to analyse inter-agency cooperation policies and practices. Brazil's unique challenges, opportunities, and contributions to global maritime security efforts are illuminated through comparative patterns presented within Global South nations, unveiling commonalities and disparities. The paper emphasises practitioners' insights and geospatial analysis, employing a dual-method approach combining maritime security practices and geospatial analysis techniques to glean comprehensive insights into inter-agency cooperation and maritime security dynamics. The methodology conducts semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, data aggregation from open-source intelligence (OSINT), simulations and scenarios, and maritime security data. Proposing Brazil's proactive engagement as a regional leader, the study advocates for enhanced inter-agency collaboration by establishing tailored coordination mechanisms, capacity-building initiatives, and knowledge-sharing platforms. Looking ahead, a call for a comprehensive approach to maritime security in the Global South comes from applying long-range prospective methods and tools with participative and collaborative roles. That urges integrating economic development, environmental protection, and social inclusion agendas alongside traditional security measures. This study paves the way for a roadmap for bolstering maritime security cooperation, underscoring Brazil's pivotal role in spearheading regional initiatives for a safer maritime domain.*

## 1. Introduction

The maritime domain, encompassing maritime security operations and intelligence, is a realm marked by complexity and uncertainty. It serves as “a fundamental strategic space for sea power, a scientific frontier for biotechnology and environmental preservation, and a crucial economic source for subsistence and development” (Lauro & Corrêa, 2022. p. 286). The literature recognises this wild and dynamic environment well, showing that hierarchy and norms do not play the same role as human collaboration schemes of knowledge transferring (Patriarca & Bergström, 2017; Lee et al., 2020). This complexity marks the importance of considering a third component that is usually forgotten regarding the contemporary merging functions between the armed forces and diverse law enforcement agencies. Within this triangulation, the customs are generally underrepresented in the dimension of maritime security policy and regarding the recognition of its responsibility in the protection of society and as a law enforcement agency, especially if it is considered that 80% of the volume of international maritime trade is carried out by maritime modal (UNCTAD, 2023).

Since the early 2000s, maritime security has increasingly featured in the security agendas of numerous countries and organisations, driven by heightened concerns over terrorism, the rise of piracy, and the growing significance of the blue economy. Concurrently, security studies have become more closely intertwined with development issues than in previous years (Bueger & Edmunds, 2017). A few cases of customs participation within maritime security schemes have been covered and analysed, particularly in South Asia and within the Belt and Road initiative, where the maritime efforts are part of the strategic integration of commercial routes (Putri & Pambudi, 2020; Sitorus, & Saputro, 2022). Regularly, studies focused on the ways armed forces are covering policing roles and how law enforcement agencies have been marked by the lack of power and internationality (Kraska & Pedrozo, 2013; Kanehara, 2020).

In this context, a recent doctoral thesis defended at the Brazilian Naval War College (BNWC) presents a concept of customs security that aligns practices associated with NATO countries with the evolving Brazilian approach, despite its unique adaptability process. A comparison of the customs security models of Brazil, France, and the United States reveals that customs security has advanced our understanding of maritime security demands.

*Customs security is the condition that enables the protection of society and the economic development of the country, in the defence of national sovereignty and interests, based on the performance of customs in the protection of borders, including digital borders, in the maintenance and encouragement of legitimate trade, and in the fight against smuggling, unfair competition, organised crime, drug trafficking and terrorism. (Cantarino C. Ramos, 2024, p. 334).*

Complementarily, the dissertation includes the proposal for a calculation of a "customs presence index in Maritime Security" to quantify the performance of countries in this dimension. The calculation calls for the adoption of the following variables in a combined manner: (1) foreign trade flow, (2) territorial sea area, (3) length of the maritime border, (4) number of personnel, air and maritime resources employed at sea, (5) existence of the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) Programmes, (5) level of synergy between maritime and customs security strategies and, finally, the (6) political and hierarchical stature of customs in government. In this respect, the values obtained for Brazil, France and the United States of America were, respectively, 0.2477, 0.9951, and 0.9818. Despite the lower numbers in Brazil, as shown by the above-cited comparison, important factors can give the country regional leadership in increasing customs security in the South Atlantic and supporting maritime security, regionally and extra-regionally.

The Brazilian Customs is considered by the World Customs Organization (WCO) as one of the references in the Southern Atlantic in terms of computerisation according to the concept of "single window". A "single window" system is a measure designed to unify and streamline the performance of stakeholders in foreign trade. This approach is grounded in the customs risk management procedures adopted in the country, which are considered key references by the World Customs Organization (WCO) and integral to the AEO program<sup>86</sup>.

Therefore, this paper aligns the consequences of this progressive triangulation between agencies dedicated to maritime security, where both international recognition and increasing participation of the customs in providing maritime security are putting the policy frameworks under pressure and transformation. Institutional development and the need to establish standards compliant with international regulatory norms are driven by the international nature of commerce, which positions the provision of security as a challenge extending beyond national boundaries.

In this analysis, this paper lays on the literature developments, the data related to operations and information sharing, and the practitioners' understanding of the scene to track maritime security agencies triangulation in Brazil. In this regard, we argue that the maritime security inter-agency scope is defined, in majority, by bidirectional relations in multiple processes and layers. That is why information sharing and gathering is crucial for the visibility of maritime security inter-agency cooperation networks, reinforcing that this is the main capacity to spread and mark interregional commitments.

With a developing bidirectional inter-agency scheme, Brazil has been moving forward on its capacity to promote change and aggregate to initiatives such as those in West Africa (ICC, CRESMAC, CRESMAO, FoGG) or those connected to Mediterranean maritime security within Italian authorities.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

This study employs a neo-institutional framework to scrutinise the policies and operational practices of customs, police departments, and armed forces of Brazil as a Global South regional leader. That is achieved through a dual-method approach, where human intervention complements the institutional frameworks that guide processes. It integrates interviews with practitioners, policy analysis, and mapping of initiatives and practices to understand the institutional dynamics shaping current policies and practices. The aim is to understand Brazilian inter-agency cooperation policies and practices.

Firstly, in-depth interviews are conducted with key stakeholders from law enforcement agencies and armed forces, including customs, designed to extract qualitative insights into the roles, challenges, and contributions of customs in maritime security, with a particular emphasis on practitioners' insights regarding inter-agency cooperation and the operational dynamics of maritime security. Secondly, geospatial analysis techniques are used to map and analyse maritime security threats' geographical dimensions and inter-agency responses. This analysis relies on tools such as inter-agency operations, maritime traffic data, OSINT and incident reports to provide a comprehensive understanding of the spatial aspects of maritime security.

## **3. Results**

While some decades ago, customs were more focused on protectionism and the fight against smuggling as their primary duties, recently, new attributions have been added in the face of the

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<sup>86</sup> The recognition of this country's capacity is also represented by the country's choice to host the "WCO Technology Conference 2024 & Exhibition (Digital Frontiers: Customs Embracing Innovation with Traditional and New Partners)", in November 2024 in Rio de Janeiro, and whose objective is to "explore how the global Customs community can take a forward-thinking approach to its mission of ensuring trade facilitation, border security, and the resilience of global supply chains (...)".<sup>86</sup>

increasing threats of globalisation. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, customs agencies expanded their roles in border security and intensified efforts to combat terrorism and transnational crimes. (WCO, 2008). A series of measures have been adopted by major international organisations, such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the World Customs Organisation<sup>87</sup> (WCO), to increase the safety and security of global maritime trade (Zhang and Roe, 2019).

The U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1368 and 1373 of 2001 (adopted shortly after the 11 September attacks) gave rise to measures adopted by these organisations. "The WCO Action Plan to Improve Security at the Frontier in order to Combat International Terrorism was approved in November 2001 by the organisation's Policy Commission and submitted to the IMO's Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) via document MSC 75/17/8, at its 75th session held in April 2002 (IMO 2002a). In this session of the MSC, the USA submitted for consideration the document MSC 75/17/33, entitled Prevention and Suppression of Acts of Terrorism Against Shipping: Container Security – U.S. Customs Container Security Initiative (CSI), demonstrating the effects of the fight against terrorism on the customs dimension of the global supply chain (IMO, 2002b).

A few months later, in June 2002, the WCO issued the Resolution of the Customs Cooperation Council on Security and Facilitation of the International Trade Supply Chain where, in the face of growing concerns about terrorism and organised crime, he highlighted the critical role and expertise that customs administrations have in border control, in the fight against fraud and the protection of society, but also about the facilitation of international trade (WCO, 2002). Such a dichotomy was represented in the binomial "security and facilitation", which has been the basis for performing customs according to the best global practices for decades.

In the context of the IMO, it is worth highlighting the SOLAS Conference held in December 2002, when the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS Code), through Resolution No. 2 of the Convention, became part of the new Annex XI-2 to the SOLAS Convention. At the same event, the Conference also adopted Resolution No. 9 on Enhancing Security in collaboration with the World Customs Organization (Closed Cargo Transport Units), underscoring the significance and advocating for supplementary measures to ISPS in conjunction with the WCO (IMO, 2002c). After all, the new code had dealt with the security of ships and port facilities, but not containerised cargo, as well as the flow of bulk cargo, passengers, baggage, etc., topics usually dealt with in the customs dimension. Over the following years, several other measures were adopted within the scope of the WCO, among them the WCO SAFE of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade (SAFE Framework), the first version of which dates back to 2005 and the most recent version from 2021 (WCO, 2021a). This Framework contains, among others, the three strategic pillars of Customs' performance that are based on the performance of (1) Customs-to-Customs, (2) Customs-to-Business, and (3) Customs-to-Other Government and Inter-Government Agencies, which includes collaboration, coordination, and cooperation with the armed forces and other law enforcement agencies, nationally and internationally. One of the results of this dynamic of customs action is the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) Programme<sup>88</sup>, which privileges legitimate trade and establishes, in return for customs privileges, security conditions for port facilities and other international trade operators.

Another noteworthy initiative is the Coordinated Border Management guidelines and best practices, which aim to foster economic and social development while securing global supply

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<sup>87</sup> The WCO has representatives from 185 countries, accounting for approximately 98% of international trade (WCO, 2024)

<sup>88</sup> Online WCO AEO Compendium: <https://aew.wcoomd.org/>

chains. In this context, the following excerpt from the SAFE Framework is particularly relevant (WCO, 2021a, p.1):

*Legitimate international trade is an essential driver for economic prosperity. The global trading system is vulnerable to terrorist exploitation that would severely damage the entire global economy and social well-being of nations. As government organisations that control and administer the international movement of goods, Customs administrations are in a unique position to provide increased security to the global supply chain and to contribute to socio-economic development through revenue collection and trade facilitation.*

The *Punta Cana Resolution - Resolution of the Policy Commission of The World Customs Organization on the Role of Customs in the Security Context*, dated December 2015 and issued shortly after a new wave of terrorist attacks in countries such as Turkey, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon and France, stands out (WCO, 2015):

*Customs authorities around the world are the first line of defence against many criminal and violent extremist and terrorist organisations that exploit international boundaries, thereby highlighting the important role of Customs in border security through management of the movement of goods, money, people and means of transport across borders.*

In this context, it is important to highlight the contributions of the Simulation and Scenarios Laboratory (SSL) at the Brazilian Naval War College, which enhances inter-agency and specialised cooperation knowledge through doctrine and policy testing and development, thereby supporting institutional development across agencies involved in maritime security.

The SSL comprises over 100 researchers, predominantly civilians not affiliated with the Brazilian Department of Defence. These researchers come from diverse academic backgrounds, universities, and companies both within Brazil and internationally, offering qualified human participation and unbiased sources of knowledge to foster innovative thinking on regional maritime issues.

The researchers focus on maritime safety and security simulations, prospective studies on defence, and future studies methodologies (Corrêa & Janick, 2021).

A model based on strategic simulation and scenario planning was proposed by Corrêa & Cagnin (2016) to improve the decision-making process in the Brazilian defence sector. The South Atlantic is a region where the interests of various regional and extra-regional actors converge, making the maintenance of peace a crucial cooperative responsibility for the countries in the region. The literature describes simulations as instruments for fostering cooperation among high-level decision-makers.

Examples demonstrate the use of war games as qualitative tools for maintaining peace and as innovative means to strengthen international cooperation in the Atlantic Ocean, addressing multiple complex and dynamic situations (Perla & McGrady, 2011; Flôr & Corrêa, 2016; Santos & Corrêa, 2023).

The Simulated Security Games, held at the Brazilian Naval War College War Gaming Centre in June of 2016, aimed at questioning the planning carried out by the Brazilian Navy Command assigned to make up the security system of the "Rio 2016 - Olympic Games". The foresight research team of the SSL organised a workshop with over a hundred participants from two distinct groups: civilian researchers specialising in maritime studies and international relations and military students enrolled in the most advanced career course at the Brazilian Naval War College.

Participants were invited to submit suggestions for potential maritime security threats to the Olympic Games and to engage in discussion and debate phases (Medeiros & Corrêa, 2017). The research project "Seed of the future for the sea economy" was made by a survey of the main

areas that could be related to the theme: defence and security; offshore energy; shipbuilding and repair; transport and infrastructure; geopolitical relations; climate and the environment; food, sport and leisure; mineral resources; sanitation; government planning, science and technology, living resources of the sea, education, economics and finance and international law and tourism. The research was carried out in 2021 by surveying the main trends, uncertainties and possible global disruptions associated with the development of the sea economy up to 2040, which were part of the gaps related to maritime borders. In total, 82 experts from 45 different institutions participated in the survey, most of whom were masters and doctors working in public institutions and public or private teaching and research institutions (Marcial et al., 2021).

#### **4. Discussion**

Recently, studies have been dedicated to mapping inter-agency schemes in the maritime domain within the South Atlantic region, especially considering the interfaces between international technical cooperation and inter-agency national and international cooperation (Medeiros & Moreira, 2017).

As a regional player, Brazil has been a driver of defence and security cooperation with West Africa. As such, it balances the scope of the North-South approach to regional security cooperation. But this had come with a dual process of internationalisation and regionalisation. That is why a Global South perspective is needed regarding transferring knowledge that crosses consolidated cooperation schemes. Conversely, there is low visibility of how middle or non-central powers are becoming more active in security cooperation frameworks at sea. Conclusions from recent literature have appointed that maritime security is being covered by national and interregional approaches to inter-agency models of cooperation, which marks agents' progressive and decentralised autonomy (Calder, Santos & Mendes, 2022; de Carvalho, da Silva & Medeiros, 2024).

Furthermore, interoperability efforts have been combined with knowledge transfer, technology enhancement, governance reforming, international patterns and educational and training approaches to security (de Carvalho, da Silva & Medeiros, 2024). The map below shows part of the study that covered the agencies collaborating with the Brazilian Navy to amplify relations within the Atlantic Region. The synergies are commonly related to similar armed forces, science & education or law enforcement agencies. However, cross-dimensional ties such as those that interface commerce and customs do not appear. They are only possible through the triangulation of polices, armed forces and customs agencies, independently or through joint efforts. So, once triangulation happens within borders, organisational learning and development may be more motivated to spread internationally through the other bonds associated with those agencies' internationalisation process, which are usually non-visible. That is the case associated broadly with developed and under-developing countries and frameworks, where the visibility of those triangulations is either ignored or out of scope (Aden, 91: 6; Gruszczak, 2016).

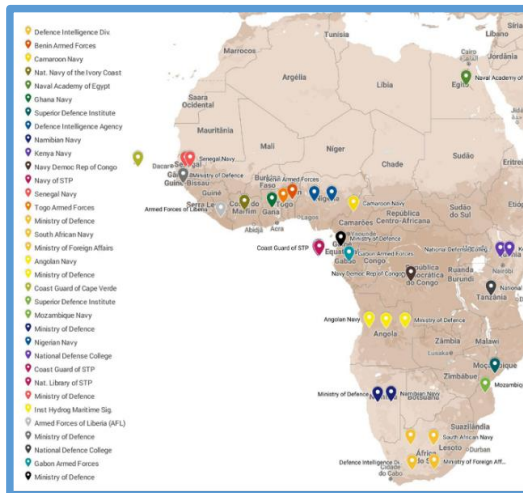


Figure 1 de Carvalho, da Silva & Medeiros, 2024.

For this paper, we opted to benefit from previous studies dedicated to mapping and creating visibility to cooperation schemes that align international and national activities connecting law enforcement and armed forces to maritime security dynamics. A group of events have contributed significantly to the ongoing process of deepening maritime domain awareness in the region. This step ahead is proposed because we have been focusing on the characteristics associated with inter-agency cooperation operations and policies. We have also considered the general insecurity threats to the maritime domain. But as we follow the dynamics and realise that there is a general ambience of commercial value to the national economies that is profoundly related to the ports and airports, we may include the customs security paradigm to uncover not only the already ongoing schemes of inter-agency cooperation but the role the customs play deepening the bilateral relations from armed forces and law enforcement agencies to the economic scope of the legal entrance and outputs of products. In that sense, this is about strengthening the combat of illicit and illegal flows and amplifying the control of the legal flows, where only customs security can compound the dilemma.



Figure 2 map generated from KML data on maritime incidents in 2024 (ICC, data aggregated by the authors)

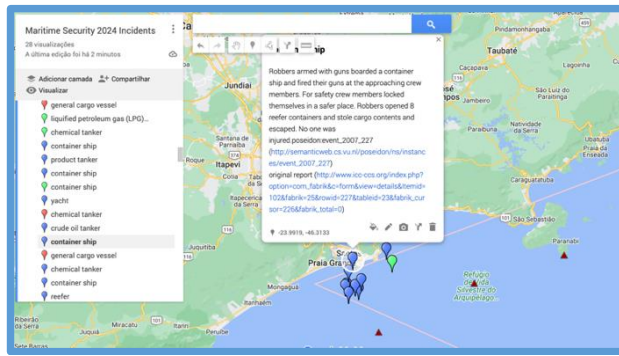


Figure 3 map generated from KML data on maritime incidents in 2024, a closer look (ICC, data aggregated by the authors)

In a closer look at the incidents associated with the Brazilian maritime territory and Economic Exclusive Zone<sup>89</sup>, we can see that, despite the natural incidents such as weather and geological phenomena, a group of armed robberies is the main data collected from defining routes of insecurity, such as those associated to the Brazilian North extreme borders and the Port of Santos. Not regularly considered are how combined and joint operations can cover patrolling and combatting insecurities and other sources of insecurities through logistics chains such as the containers. In a recent study visit to Cartagena (Colombia), we found that the internationally renowned and high level of efficiency infrastructure (5<sup>th</sup> port efficiency in the world) may offer gaps to container control, as private-public concessions cannot cover all containers and usually ignore those that are passing through the port structure but are not in bounding and out bounding from the port (origin or final destiny).

In this respect, Brazilian inter-agency operations generally cover the main illicit routes associated with the connection between inland waters and the territorial seas, as the figure below shows based on a study comparing identified routes of insecurity and inter-agency cooperative operations (de Carvalho, da Silva & Medeiros, 2024).

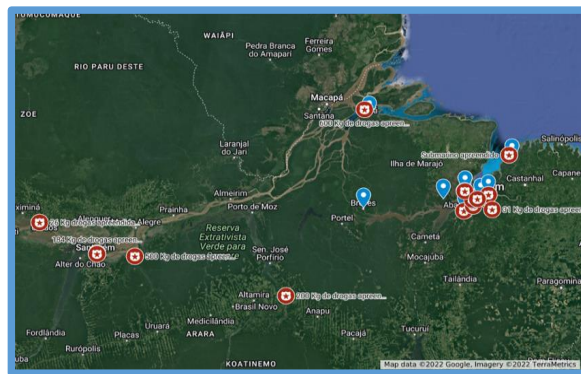


Figure 4 River inter-agency operations against illicit activities (de Carvalho, da Silva & Medeiros, 2024)

Patrolling and controlling major commerce routes are primarily the armed forces' responsibilities (when it involves borders) and law enforcement agencies. Customs and Police Centres (PCCC), Fusion Centres, and Command and Control Centres (C3) are models of combining initiatives with a focus on intelligence gathering and good practices evolvments.

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.google.com/maps/d/embed?mid=1shnn9kjghoJ-pViU9v7ne-S3CMV0ZWQ&ehbc=2E312F>

Although those initiatives are commonly associated with integrating processes within national or regime-building scopes, their roles have been associated with border control as competence to combat irregular circulation within borders. That is the case of the Police and Customs Cooperation Centre within the Council of the European Union, where the roles appear as the prevention and fight against illegal immigration, cross-border crime, threats to public order, illicit trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings (Gruszczak, 2016).

Regarding African countries like Angola, issues related to border control systems addressing irregular migrant flows often overlook regular analysis of customs maritime security (João, 2020). Commercial containers do not seem to be prioritised as valuable resources for fostering development and environmental security.

The embracement of the customs security concept is not only one of the agents for patrolling control. Centres dedicated to sharing information and combining different roles have been a practice towards complexity.

In the neo-institutional approach, organisational innovations may contribute to widening the efficiency of the systems built to enhance maritime security and good order at sea. These are significant challenges in Brazil, which has a 7,500 km coastline and jurisdictional waters of about 5.7 million km<sup>2</sup>, more than half of land territory, under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. Such a vast area is also known as the Blue Amazon<sup>®</sup> due to its uncountable richness in biodiversity and geodiversity, as is the land green Amazon.

To cope with such challenges, the Brazilian Navy created in 2021 the Blue Amazon Maritime Operations and Protection Command (COMPAAz), headquartered in Rio de Janeiro. That new body evolved from the former Integrated Maritime Security Centre (CISMAR) and merged with other operational sections to improve the Naval Operations Command command and control capacity.

Such organisational innovation integrates means, high-tech monitoring and information-sharing systems, and capabilities to generate synergies between previously separate bodies and other institutions and stakeholders with responsibilities with good order at sea. (Pires & Moreira et al., 2022, p. 717)

The COMPAAz has a central role in providing protection and enabling better governance of the Blue Amazon<sup>®</sup>, considering that the Navy Commander is also the National Maritime Authority. Inter-agency cooperation is fundamental for developing maritime domain awareness and accomplishing the Navy's mission. It requires disposition and adaptation capacity to deal with institutions linked by the aim to enhance security at sea but with different operational protocols and legal frameworks, which include law enforcement agencies such as customs.

Since threats such as criminal activity by the sea and drug or human trafficking are transnational, a long-term approach is required to plan and prepare regional maritime security and defence strategies and actions. Building participative future scenarios and simulations can help reduce complexity and uncertainty to a few critical factors by prioritisation, increasing visibility and cooperative testing with multiple agencies (Popper, 2008; Santos & Corrêa, 2023). As an example of future studies to deal with emerging threats and opportunities, the Global Maritime Trends 2050 research programme aims to deliver a series of deep dives providing evidence, insight, and foresight on the large-scale challenges affecting the maritime industry between now and 2050, drawing on expert analyses and robust data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape and the potential implications for various maritime stakeholders (Economist Impact, 2023).

At least two examples must be mentioned regarding forward-looking initiatives of the customs-related institutions. The WCO has produced the WCO Customs Environmental Scan both to inform its members and stakeholders of relevant issues, preparing them to learn about the future and to support the development of the WCO Strategic Plan, including different aspects such as economic, political, social, environmental that directly or indirectly relate to Customs. It was helped by the WCO Private Sector Consultative Group (PSCG), which issued *The Future of Customs with the WCO and Trade* (WCO, 2021b).

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) issued "The Future of Customs in the E.U. 2040", a report to support strategic reflection on the future of the European Union's Customs Union. The study was launched after a year-long participatory and multidisciplinary foresight process that involved all relevant stakeholder groups as "representatives of Member States, key trading partners, trade associations, businesses, consumer organisations, international organisations, academia, and different services and Directorates-General of the European Commission" (Ghiran et al., 2020). To the diversity and complexity aspects we want to distinguish in this paper, we highlight that this effort was taken together with the Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD), which aims to establish new inter-agency and multimodal approaches.

## **5. Conclusion**

The relevance of customs to maritime security is increasingly recognised, mainly through adopting the customs security concept. This concept expands beyond traditional roles to include significant responsibilities in patrolling and control. Centres dedicated to sharing information and integrating various roles have become essential for managing complexity and enhancing the integration and efficiency of maritime security efforts.

The triangulation between customs, police department, and the armed forces is critical for comprehensive maritime security. However, studies and analyses often overlook the role of regular law enforcement in screening and auditing logistics systems. Instead, the focus has been on customs patrol and the gaps in capabilities related to controlling areas where information is scarce, such as small vessel monitoring (Guilfoyle, 2017).

Many specialised studies aimed at enhancing this coordination overlook trends and models of multimodal and multilayer inter-agency initiatives and the implementation of international protocols within these systems. For instance, in some cases in Africa, ocean governance practices have shifted towards community engagement approaches due to a lack of resources, resulting in various approaches to enhance the effectiveness of maritime security efforts (McCabe, 2019). However, these initiatives often do not include customs security, particularly in sharing inter-agency capabilities for patrolling operations.

In South America, this approach is innovative. It includes integrated simulations in participatory foresight processes, broadens the civilian-military dynamic relationship, and incorporates diverse viewpoints in defence implications analysis, engaging a broader segment of Brazilian society. Customs, in this context, serves as a vital source of information for maritime domain awareness.

For future studies, it is crucial to implement multi-layered inter-agency initiatives, consider multimodal trends, and understand how international protocols function within these frameworks. Deepening the specialised studies on customs security and fostering inter-agency collaboration is essential to address the complexities of maritime security and enhance overall effectiveness.

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