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Regímenes de cooperación internacional, paradigmas globales y redes de inteligencia en América Latina

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Summary

International cooperation regimes, global paradigms and intelligence networks in Latin America

This study provides evidence, at both the Latin American and global levels, that there are gaps in the analysis and understanding of the role of intelligence at a multidisciplinary level. The same is true in international intelligence cooperation. The reason is, in part, the limitation generated by the paradigm of assuming that intelligence cooperation as is part of traditional security cooperation. However, at present, within the realm of security, we speak of asymmetric threats. Among these threats are social exclusion, poverty, pandemics, corruption, or environmental degradation. Because of their high level of unpredictability and uncertainty, these threats require cooperation that allows use of for processed information (intelligence) for better decision-making. Unfortunately, these threats cannot always be addressed through what, in theory and practice, are understood as security cooperation regimes.

The central problem that this work addresses is related precisely to the absence of specialized academic studies on intelligence cooperation. This denotes a lack of awareness of its true scope and relevance. Thus, a large part of the principal studies on the subject avoids the inclusion of diverse approaches and experiences, such as those from Latin America. With limited exceptions (some very valuable), studies have not been prioritized, for example, to determine the relationship between intelligence cooperation, in its various forms, with the conception of international cooperation regimes (ICRs). Nor are there studies on whether the former necessarily depends on broader security cooperation. The challenge lies in breaking paradigms, presenting approaches from diverse angles, and obtaining new elements of theoretical, practical and comparative analysis. Likewise, the nature and role of cooperation through various forms of international intelligence cooperation networks (IICNs), whether they are called regimes or not, must be more precisely determined. Cases related to cooperation between or from intelligence systems of Latin America in this study are a valuable mechanism, yet up to now have remained underexplored in developing this type of analysis and identifying possible gaps.

In general terms, this research does not start from zero. There is a growing and valuable academic debate that, for its theoretical and practical importance, requires confronting the principal controversies arising around it. In that debate, it is precisely Latin American academia that is making new contributions from a regional or at least diverse optic that this research aims to take advantage of and develop.

Despite the scarcity of available sources, especially precedents of expert studies, as well as field activities, a valid work methodology has been developed. This is defined through two parameters, namely research modalities and data collection techniques. In both cases,

the parameters have been based on a design or research plan, which has been adjusted and evolved over six years of work.

Regarding the first parameter, the research modality adopted was predominantly qualitative. Both interactive and non-interactive techniques were chosen, with greater emphasis on the latter. In other words, the study of historical concepts and events was made through document analyses and an extensive bibliographic study. These techniques include examining various publications related to the subject. These range from academic works to the international press, digital or print, as well as material obtained in field research. In relation specifically to field work, the most relevant of this study was carried out in the Triple Border (the so-called Triple Frontera) of South America (between Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina), for which the so-called interactive grounded theory was successfully used. This study goes beyond the detailed description of facts and phenomena, developing concepts and substantive approaches. It does so through face-to-face techniques, which collect data from people in their natural settings. These techniques make use of constant comparative methods. In addition, they perform analyses that simultaneously employ induction, deduction and verification techniques.

In the second parameter used, which refers to data collection techniques, and which are again divided into quantitative and qualitative, the latter also was predominant. Among these techniques, four main ones are used: 1) participant observation; 2) field observation; 3) the in-depth interview; and, 4) the technique of documents and equipment, along with a great variety of supplementary techniques.

Within the framework of these methodological resources, Chapter 1 starts with foundational questionings derived from the identification of the central problem. Subsequently, an attempt is made to understand cooperation through networks and intelligence systems using theory and case studies, primarily from Latin America. For this, paradigm shifts are proposed, and it is suggested to analyse the validity of existing definitions. Levels, areas, categorizations and impediments for cooperation are proposed for this field. Finally, cooperation in traditional intelligence and that which comes from the so-called Global South, particularly from Latin America, is explored. This exploration allows for the identification of relevant contributions and gaps, which should be included in the global academic discussion.

Chapter 2 strives to strengthen and expand the existing academic debate, starting from a necessary discussion of basic theoretical elements (from an inter-paradigmatic approach). An understanding of the conception of international cooperation regimes is an essential requirement in this regard. This expanded debate will serve for a subsequent analysis of the behaviour of international cooperation networks in intelligence, compared to that of international cooperation regimes, mainly in security matters. Thus, a structure is established for an analysis of cases related to countries such as Cuba or Colombia, and primarily that of the Triple Border of South America. Despite its complexity, the latter facilitates the empirical foundation of the final comparative study.

In the development of this study, questions arise as to whether the reasons for cooperating through intelligence networks are the same or are assimilated to those existing in cooperation in traditional international regimes, such as security. In fact, this reasoning raises a basic hypothesis. That hypothesis suggests relevant differences and similarities. It also requires necessary clarifications, between international cooperation in intelligence, and that produced in security. In practice, between intelligence cooperation and any other thematic area of international relations. Greater clarity on the relationship or independence of intelligence cooperation with security cooperation, or other fields, would allow for a more efficient approach to current threats and the proposed case studies.

Chapter 3 suggests that nowadays, more than ever, international threats and opportunities have no borders. They are also presented more quickly than the possibility of acquiring information or intelligence about them. The case of the Triple Border of South America (TFAS or 3F) has been used as the main theoretical and field case study in this study. This case has an influence that goes beyond the territories and states that are directly affected (Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay). It involves, among many other countries and actors, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Mexico. In fact, its influence extends as far as remote African and European routes for products both licit and illicit to the most complex money laundering systems in the Middle East, China or the United States. Additionally, this case breaks with the paradigms discussed in the first chapter: those who understand intelligence cooperation as dependent on security cooperation; who conceive intelligence as an exclusive activity of the States; or who assume a generalized North-South unidirectional cooperation in this field.

The field study on intelligence cooperation, developed through and around the Tripartite Command of the Triple Border of South America, provides evidence of an irreplaceable local human intelligence (Humint). Add to this the technological structure of signal intelligence (Signint). Signint would come from the 3 + 1 cooperation (Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, plus the United States), as well as from Interpol and the Mercosur Security Information Exchange System, known as Sisme. That is to say, its own as well as regional cooperation. The case constitutes, through formal and informal agreements and processes, both open and reserved, a valuable example of intelligence networks with numerous variables for analysis and evaluation.

Chapter 4 conducts an essential comparative analysis in order to reach informed conclusions. Although it does not correspond with a characteristic cooperation format, here it is determined that reciprocal self-containment, based on principles and norms around which interests converge, is possible in intelligence. This means that, in principle, there could be intelligence cooperation regimes, or moments in which intelligence cooperation acts as such. Nevertheless, given the nature of intelligence, international cooperation in this field cannot be pigeonholed within a single concept, no matter how flexible it may be. This includes the concept of international regimes, even in diverse occasions when intelligence cooperation fulfils that role.

To be more specific, international intelligence cooperation, particularly through what are called international intelligence cooperation networks, could take various forms. Among these is a specific and sometimes limited type of international cooperation regime. It is also possible to think of a sub-regime of cooperation. On the other hand, there is the possibility of adopting a form of international relations that up to now has nearly always been linked to the thematic area of security and influenced by a series of paradigms. Another form that it could adopt is that of a quasi-regime, if one considers that intelligence cooperation tends not to be formally institutionalized. Finally, it is possible to think of a transversal support tool for all types of international regimes, in which processed information is required for better decision-making.

The analysis carried out in Chapter 4 contrasts with the content of the previous three chapters. It permits evidence of facts, consolidates possible conclusions, and guides future studies. Evidence, for example, that international cooperation networks in financial intelligence, in the case of the Triple Border, best facilitates the comparison of networks with regimes (particularly security cooperation regimes). At the same time, it permits visibility, with greater precision, of the grey areas that exist between forms of cooperation. The contrasting of academic questioning, theory and practice in this chapter also facilitates exemplifying with sufficient clarity the functioning of the so-called intelligence cycle and therefore also of international cooperation around the activities of this cycle. In other words, upon returning to the financial networks in the Triple Border, the observation of cooperation processes is allowed, from obtaining basic data on the number of banks and inhabitants, to the elaboration of scenarios of possible illicit purposes for which the banking system would be used. All this is necessary for proper decision-making, which is the ultimate goal of the intelligence.

In the Triple Frontier, one could speak of an understood reciprocity, under the evident criterion that there is a current or potential benefit for all members. The 3 + 1 support from the United States to the 3 countries of the Tripartite Command, is essentially technological in nature and of mutual benefit. This scheme also makes it easier to conceive of the triple border as a scenario of South-South and North-South intelligence cooperation at the same time. Finally, a series of exercises on the centrality of the nodules (adding external variables and mutual multilateral affiliations), facilitates illustrating links and interactions graphically; and, therefore, relate (or not) to the networks with criteria applicable to international regimes.

The system of cooperation networks around the alliance between the Tripartite Command and the Mercosur Security Information Exchange System (Sisme), confronts another set of networks that are mainly non-State in nature. The most representative is perhaps the Barakat money laundering network, which is part of a larger network of financing to Hezbollah, and at the same time cooperates in matters of intelligence. Among these networks, almost all possible combinations or modalities of cooperation and actors can be found. Thus, Chinese mafia networks are identified presumably arming Egyptian

extremists, operating in complicity and through reciprocal interconnections with local Paraguayan authorities, which in turn provide information to networks created by Hezbollah, etc. In the latter cases, since they are networks or interconnections motivated by simple, direct and immediate self-interest, their relationship with traditional international regimes can be clearly ruled out. At the same time, they facilitate non generalization (academic) about all networks that cooperate in intelligence, by demonstrating the breadth and variety in their form and substance. The case of the Triple Border shows variations in cooperation instruments, support structures and coordination. Some could constitute international cooperation regimes, others definitely not. There are many possibilities in between, and the analysis must therefore be done on an ad hoc basis.

Sisme, as a process linked to cooperation in the Triple Border, and as a network in itself, or an international regime, enriches the analysis of organizations that include the intelligence cooperation component. Sisme also contributes to the understanding of the functioning, balances, vulnerabilities, and strengths of this type of cooperation. In fact, this body (Sisme) clearly presents an intelligence network structure, with internal and external administration; responsibilities; regulation on the use of information; and, contributions based on the capacities of each member, but with equal benefit sharing. Other dynamics such as those used in Interpol, Segib and other spaces, could corroborate the criterion that multilateral agencies and organizations can play a relevant role as networks or as cooperation regimes in the intelligence area.

Among many others, there are two conclusions academic in nature that should be highlighted. The first is to accept international cooperation regimes as instruments for a better understanding of international relations. This is because they constitute an analytically useful notion for understanding their dynamic and evolutionary character. The second is that international cooperation networks in intelligence are an instrument for understanding and analysing a form of international relations. This relationship does not necessarily follow traditional parameters, but it also has a dynamic and evolutionary character, which has been scarcely observed, analysed and used by academia.

Despite the continued limited attention to this issue, there are valuable Latin American contributions that should be part of the global debate. These correspond, in part, to the various waves of intelligence systems restructuring in the region, as well as to crises and critical junctures which have generated analysis and lessons learned. This dissertation, which arises outside of the traditional anglo-sphere without ignoring it, aims to contribute with a broader, or at least more diverse, knowledge about cooperation in the field of intelligence. This allows an unlinking from dependency on security studies by providing new elements of analysis applicable to various subject areas. In short, it provides inputs to continue exploring and deepening this field of study.