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# BLUE AMAZON: BRAZIL'S MARITIME VOCATION

Vinicius Mariano De Carvalho

## Abstract

This article discusses how the concept of the Blue Amazon, created by the Brazilian Navy, is a fundamental tool of strategic communications for establishing and consolidating Brazil as a seapower, hence contributing to the construction of a grand strategy narrative in which maritime power becomes vital to the country. The article explains how the concept was created and how it has been used in relation to the principles of maritime strategy and maritime power. Furthermore, this concept contributes to the strategic redefinition of the perception of Brazilian national identity, reincorporating an awareness of the sea as a key element.

**Keywords**—*Brazilian maritime strategy, Brazilian Navy, Blue Amazon, strategic communication, strategic communications, grand strategy, seapower*

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On one of the panels on display at the Imperial War Museum in London there is a poster with the following quote from Erskine Childers, author of *The Riddle of the Sands*, writing in 1903: 'We're a maritime nation—we've grown by the sea and live by it; if we lose command of it we starve.'<sup>1</sup>

This short sentence summarises well what a national maritime mentality means: something beyond the concerns of naval and maritime professionals only, and which comes to embody a national identity by itself. From the perspective of strategic communications this quote is exemplary. It is emblematic of the dilemmas of a country's grand strategy whilst calling for a broad commitment to maintain command and control over the seas.

This quote would apply not only to the UK but also to many other nations. Brazil, in particular, could rightfully define itself as a maritime nation—this would be consistent with its historical and geopolitical reality. In practical terms, however, the country has fully developed neither a national maritime awareness nor a maritime mentality.

The Portuguese colonisation of South America, in what would later be called Brazil, took place along the coast. The colonisers arrived from Portugal by sea and used the sea to circulate throughout their colonial territories. Brazil's first cities were coastal, and most of the population is distributed along the more than 7,000 km of Brazil's coastline on the Atlantic. The territorial occupation and colonisation of the Brazilian interior was consolidated only in the twentieth century. Demographic gaps in Brazilian territory show the extent to which the country is still coastal. Brazil has the right to explore a large ocean area of about 4.5 million km<sup>2</sup>, equivalent to approximately half of the country's territory on dry land. There are vast pre-salt reserves<sup>2</sup> located along the Brazilian Continental Shelf; about 85% of the oil, 75% of the natural gas, and 45% of the fish produced in the country are extracted from this area. More than 95% of Brazilian foreign trade flows through sea routes. Moreover, there are still untapped natural resources in the rich biodiversity of these reserves. Even with all this heritage and trade, the idea of Brazil as a maritime nation has not yet fully made its way into the popular imagination, nor has the idea that Brazilians could claim such an identity.

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1 Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Service* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1903).

2 The Brazilian pre-salt oil region, first explored in 2006 by Petrobras, is an oil-rich offshore reserve trapped below a 2,000m-thick layer of salt, which itself is located below 2,000m-thick post-salt sediments, located at the Brazilian Continental Shelf. For more details, see the description of [Pre-Salt](http://Petrobras.br) on the Petrobras.br.com website.

Seeking to alert society about the strategic importance of this vast maritime space, the Brazilian Navy created the concept of the *Amazônia Azul*, the Blue Amazon. The Blue Amazon concept aims at drawing attention to the immense importance of Brazil's oceanic heritage and the imperative need to protect and preserve the marine life and natural resources that can be found in these waters—a condition of securing ownership and sovereignty over this priceless treasure. The Brazilian Navy plays a key role in the protection of this space and its resources because, in addition to a navy's usual functions, the *Marinha do Brasil* is responsible for the constabulary tasks of the coastguard and the port authority, and also performs scientific and technological tasks and undertakes actions for the development of the country, such as health care for riverine populations, projects for public education and infrastructure works.

Raising national maritime awareness means encouraging the country to understand itself as a maritime nation, responsible for taking care of the resources available in the Brazilian sea. This is a key argument used by the Brazilian Navy to expand its remit. It is vital to the concept of the Blue Amazon.

In this article I discuss how the concept of the Blue Amazon is used as a strategic communications tool for consolidating Brazil's maritime mentality, hence contributing to the construction of a grand strategy narrative in which maritime power becomes vital to Brazil. I will explain how the concept was created and how it has been used in relation to the principles of maritime strategy and maritime power. To this end, I will be borrowing ideas from two authors, fundamental in the development of the concepts of Maritime Strategy and Seapower: Geoffrey Till, from his classic *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (2018); and the understanding of seapower states from the definition given by Andrew Lambert in *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict that Made the Modern World* (2018). Lambert distinguishes 'sea power' from 'seapower', reinforcing how much the latter is not only about expressions of power at sea, but also refers to states whose identities are fully connected with the sea. In his own words:

These states are disproportionately engaged with global trade, unusually dependent on imported resources, and culturally attuned to maritime activity. [...] Seapower identity remains a question of national engagement with the sea, a definition reserved for states that are inherently, and even existentially, vulnerable to the loss of control over sea communications.

As the concept includes mythology, emotion and values it is not capable of accurate calculation.<sup>3</sup>

This article argues that the Blue Amazon concept is a fundamental tool of strategic communications for establishing and consolidating Brazil as a seapower. Furthermore, this concept contributes to the strategic redefinition of the perception of Brazilian national identity, reincorporating an awareness of the sea as a key element. In light of the difficulty inherent in measuring this concept, following Lambert's warning, the argument presented here does not involve quantitative data. Rather, it shows how the Blue Amazon concept can transform Brazilian national consciousness to include a maritime consciousness, beyond its bare geographical inevitability, through political-strategic decisions.<sup>4</sup>

In this text, I understand strategic communications as 'the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to influence attitudes and opinions of target audiences to shape their behaviour in order to advance interests or policies, or to achieve objectives'.<sup>5</sup> This paper focuses on an analysis of the communicative aspect of the Blue Amazon concept. However, I do not intend to explore the Blue Amazon concept as a brand or propaganda piece. I argue that the Blue Amazon concept arose from the need to reinforce the latent Brazilian maritime identity in order to advance a clear maritime strategy that reflects Brazilian maritime power. This is much in line with the concept of strategic communications presented in the recent *NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*, published by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.<sup>6</sup>

The Blue Amazon concept is an effective example of US President Barack Obama's definition of strategic communications in 2010, in a report on a 'comprehensive interagency strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communication' submitted to the US national congress:

By "strategic communication(s)" we refer to: (a) the synchronization of words and deeds and how they will be perceived by selected audiences, as well as (b) programs and

3 Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict that Made the Modern World* (London: Yale University Press, 2018) p. 7.

4 Lambert, *Seapower States*, p. 13.

5 James Farwell, *The Art of Strategic Communication* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012) p. xix.

6 This publication defines strategic communications as: 'A holistic approach to communication based on values and interests that encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment.' Neville Bolt and Leonie Haiden, *NATO Strategic Communications Terminology* (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2019) p. 46.

activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences, including those implemented by public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations professionals.<sup>7</sup>

First, I will explain the origins of the term Blue Amazon and its metaphorical meaning. Then, I will explore how the concept was rooted in a solid strategic perception of the sea by the Brazilian Navy, and the ways in which the Navy is communicating it to a broader audience, from school children to authorities and influencers. Finally, I will point out some potential issues concerning the use of the term *Amazônia Azul*, due to the ‘semantic loan’ of the ideas already infused into the concept of the ‘Amazon’ as it is understood in Brazil and elsewhere.

### The Origins of the Blue Amazon

Brazil, along with 167 other countries, is a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).<sup>8</sup> This international treaty defines a country’s maritime spaces:

*territorial waters*—a coastal state is free to set laws, regulate use, and use any resource up to 12 nautical miles (NM) from the baseline

*baseline*—the line along the coast from which a state’s maritime zones of jurisdiction are measured

*contiguous zone*—a state can enforce laws relating to customs, taxation, immigration, and pollution a further 12 NM adjacent to the territorial sea, with a maximum limit of 24 NM measured from the baseline

*exclusive economic zone (EEZ)*—a coastal nation has exclusive exploitation rights, including fishing and oil extraction rights, within its EEZ, extending 200 NM from the baseline

7 Joseph Biden and Nancy Pelosi, *National Framework for Strategic Communication* (United States: White House Office, March 2010) p. 2

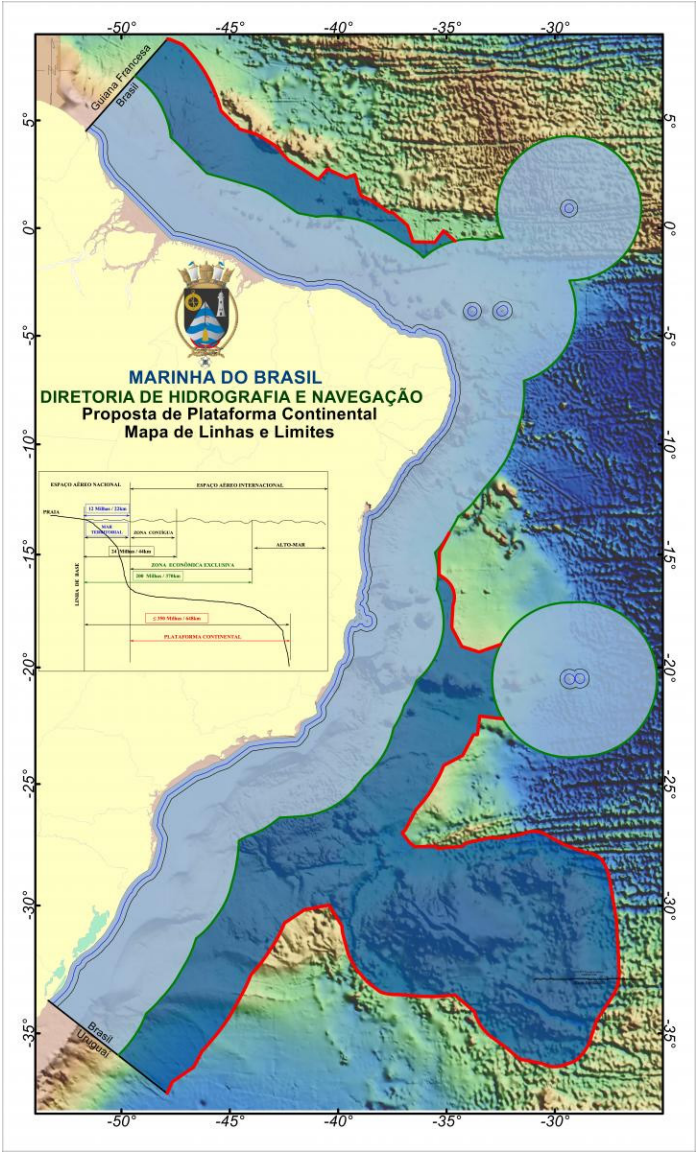
8 The process of determining internationally accepted rights and responsibilities of nations with regard to their use of the world’s oceans has a long history. Negotiations for the modern convention began after WWII led by the United Nations. It was only at the UNCLOS III, after nine years of deliberations (1973–82), that claims to territorial waters were defined. Brazil signed in Montego Bay on 10 December 1982. However, the convention only entered into force on 16 November 1994, twelve months after the 60th state ratified the agreement, as stipulated in ‘Article 308: Entry Into Force’ of the convention.

*continental shelf*—coastal states have the right to harvest mineral and non-mineral resources and the living resources ‘attached to’ (not living in the waters of) the continental shelf, which comprises the ground and subsoil of submarine areas beyond the territorial sea; it may extend 200 NM or to the outer edge of the continental margin, whichever is greater, but never farther than 350 NM from the baseline.

A number of complementary concepts were also defined in the UNCLOS. A country’s *internal waters* are any waters on the landward side of the baseline. For example, in Brazil, these include the Amazon River, the São Francisco River, and the Lagoa dos Patos, as well as the waters surrounding the archipelagos of Martim Vaz and Trindade, Fernando de Noronha, and the Atoll das Rocas. *International waters*, or the *high seas*, are defined as waters that transcend national boundaries, over which no nation exercises sovereign jurisdiction. The convention also defines what is called the *regime of islands*.<sup>9</sup> As the rights and responsibilities associated with islands can significantly expand a state’s maritime territory, in the late 1990s Brazil adopted measures regarding what had previously been known as the rocks at São Pedro e São Paulo, located about 520 NM from the Brazilian coastal city of Natal, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Norte: the name was changed from ‘rocks’ to ‘archipelago’, a lighthouse was installed to replace one that had been destroyed by an earthquake in 1930, and a scientific station was built and permanently manned by a small group of researchers and Navy personnel.

*Map 1* provides a sense of the Brazilian maritime potential once UNCLOS requirements are applied. It is important to note that Brazil’s jurisdictional territory in the waters—the coastal waters along the *continental shelf* together with the ocean surrounding the Arquipélago de Fernando de Noronha, the Arquipélago de São Pedro e São Paulo, and the Arquipélago de Trindade e Martim Vaz—roughly corresponds in size to the territory of the Brazilian Amazon, which in this article I will call the ‘Green Amazon’.

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9 UNCLOS Article 121, Regime of Islands, states that 1) An island is a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide. 2) Except as provided for in paragraph 3, the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of an island are determined in accordance with the provisions of this Convention applicable to other land territory. 3) Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.



Map 1. Blue Amazon<sup>10</sup>

10 Source: <https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/sites/www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/files/pictures/linhamar2019.jpg>



The largest rainforest and largest reservoir of freshwater in the world, the Green Amazon is today the world's largest bank of biological diversity. The Amazonian biome holds one third of the world's rainforests and has vast mineral deposits. With a low population density, the region is an important natural laboratory for research, and attracts a number of mostly destructive, extractivist activities. The Brazilian Amazon covers 49% (4,196,943 km<sup>2</sup>) of the total area of the country. The Amazon absorbs and stores large amounts of carbon, playing an important role in the global climate balance. The Amazon Basin holds the world's largest hydrographic network, which drains about one fifth of the world's fresh water. Sixty percent of the Amazon Basin is located in Brazilian territory. By itself, the basin of Rio Negro, one of the tributaries of the Amazon, contains more fresh water than the sum of all Europe's rivers. The diversity of environments in the Amazon (upland forest, transitional forest, and several varieties of flooded forest) makes it home to the largest variety of birds, primates, rodents, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and freshwater fish in the world. Almost 70% of the mammal species in Brazil live in the Amazon.<sup>11</sup>

In August 2019, the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics [*Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística* or IBOPE], conducted a public survey entitled Perceptions about the Amazon [*Percepções da Amazônia*]; the results were revealing. 88% of Brazilians see the Amazon as a reason for national pride, and 95% say that preserving it is essential to maintaining this sense of pride. Respondents were almost unanimous—94%—in their opinion that protecting the Amazon is fundamental to Brazil's identity. For 97%, the conservation of Amazonian biological diversity is decisive for the Brazilian environment and 94% agree that it is also essential for the global environment. Eighty-seven percent of respondents recognise the importance of the Amazon to the Brazilian economy and 93% are concerned about the increase in illegal deforestation in the region.<sup>12</sup>

Taking into consideration the high level of national awareness around the 'Green Amazon', its richness and potentialities, as well as the fact that the importance of guaranteeing national sovereignty over this territory is already well established in the imagination of the Brazilian population, the Brazilian Navy coined the name 'Blue Amazon' to refer to Brazil's maritime sphere of interest and responsibility.

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11 Brasil, Ministério do Meio Ambiente. Amazônia 2019.

12 IBOPE, Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística. Pesquisa de Opinião Pública Percepções sobre a Amazônia. Agosto de 2019.

The obvious association between the Blue Amazon and the ‘Green Amazon’ is advantageous and strategic in many ways. The national awareness around the richness of that territorial region and the need for its sustainable exploitation, as well as the unmistakable sense of ecological importance and national pride in sovereignty over the Amazon forest is already deeply ingrained in the Brazilian national identity, as the survey quoted above shows. Translating, or transposing, the semantic value of the word ‘Amazon’ onto the ocean brings with it all the values the Brazilian Navy intends to build into a Brazilian maritime mentality.

Frederico Brandini, a Brazilian oceanographer, explains the power of this correlation with the ‘Green Amazon’:

The set of biomes of a nation is what breeds its wealth and what shapes its cultural and socioeconomic features. On a regional level, each biome has its part in the development of Brazilian society as a whole. The Amazon rainforest is inestimable. Its ecological significance and biotechnological potential are immensurable in our scale of values [...]. Now ponder what your life would be like in Brazil without the Amazon. Now try to do the same with regard to our sea.<sup>13</sup>

Blue Amazon, then, is a ‘semantic loan’. Transferring the national awareness of the Green Amazon to the maritime environment facilitates a quick and efficient introduction to the need for a maritime awareness amongst diverse actors, both nationally and internationally. This could be considered just another branding mechanism, as brand marketers are normally interested in leveraging value transference from one concept to another. However, in this specific case, what the Brazilian Navy is doing goes beyond simple branding, as it is provoking a change in the strategic perception of that maritime territory and in Brazil’s relationship with it.

In order to popularise the name ‘Blue Amazon’ and insert this new geopolitical reality into the broader strategic debate, as well as to foster the construction of a Brazilian maritime mentality, a ‘Blue Amazon National Day’ [*Dia Nacional da Amazônia Azul*] was established by Law № 13.187 on 11 November 2015, the same day that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea entered into force.

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13 Frederico Brandini, ‘*Amazônia Azul... uma ova!*’, *O Eco*, 5 February 2009. [Accessed 1 September 2019]

A series of activities and geopolitical studies focusing on the sea, also called *oceanopolitics*, was initiated or strengthened under the 'brand name' Blue Amazon with a view to consolidating a maritime consciousness in Brazil.

Thus, the 'Blue Amazon' has become a specific term with high communicative power that has the potential, as a political-strategic concept, to definitively insert oceanic spaces into Brazil's identity, to guide development projects, and to help define the preservation and sustainable use practices of Brazil's seas and rivers. Furthermore, the concept contributes to the construction of Brazil's national grand strategy. In addition, it highlights and revitalises the Brazilian maritime vocation, with the support of historical facts related to the sea and rivers. The concept is a strong instrument of awareness for the need to defend Brazil's national sovereignty over its ocean territories from external aggression.

The Blue Amazon concept is now omnipresent in the identity of the Brazilian Navy. It is also the first subject referred to in speeches, notes, announcements, and, more widely, in any internal or external communication from the Brazilian Navy. The Navy presents its mission as caring for the 4.5 million km<sup>2</sup> of Brazilian Jurisdictional Waters. To carry out its mission, the Navy must modernise both its activities and equipment. Such modernisation includes the Submarine Development Program, the Navy Nuclear Program, and the *Tamandaré* Class Corvette Construction Program. The Blue Amazon concept also justifies the acquisition of new naval, aircraft, and marine assets, such as the recent incorporations of three *Mearim* class Ocean Support Ships, and the new Flag Ship of the Brazilian Navy—the multipurpose helicopter carrier PHM *Atlântico* (formerly the HMS *Ocean*, purchased from the British Royal Navy). Three of the major programmes of the Brazilian Navy—the Brazilian Nuclear Programme, the Navy Nuclear Programme, and the Navy Submarine Programme—were consolidated in 2013 under the umbrella of a company called *Amazônia Azul Tecnologias de Defesa*—AMAZUL [Blue Amazon Technologies of Defence].<sup>14</sup>

Still, in preparation for fully exercising its sovereignty over its maritime territory and for incorporating what was agreed upon with regard to UNCLOS, the Brazilian government created the Brazilian Continental Shelf Survey Plan [*Plano de Levantamento da Plataforma Continental Brasileira*, or LEPLAC],<sup>15</sup> established by federal Decree № 98.145 on 15 September 1989. LEPLAC is a programme

14 See: <https://www.marinha.mil.br/amazul/>

15 See: <https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/leplac>

for determining the oceanic area beyond the EEZ, in which Brazil exercises its exclusive sovereign rights for the exploration and exploitation of the natural resources of the seabed and underground of its continental shelf, as established by UNCLOS.

The Blue Amazon concept was largely a result of the findings of the LEPLAC. Once the information about the outer boundary of the platform was complete, extensive ocean areas beyond the two hundred-mile boundary line was incorporated into the Brazilian jurisdiction.<sup>16</sup> This also led to the establishment of the National Maritime Policy [*Política Marítima Nacional* or PMN], aiming at the development of Brazilian maritime activities; to the development of the IV Sectoral Plan for Sea Resources [*Plano Setorial para os Recursos do Mar* or IV PSRM], which complements previous plans that address the research and exploration activities of maritime resources in the country, and to the Sustainable Potential Assessment of Living Resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone [*Recursos Vivos na Zona Econômica Exclusiva* or REVIZEE Program],<sup>17</sup> which continues and expands the work of the IV PSRM.

The Interministerial Commission for the Resources of the Sea [*Comissão Interministerial para os Recursos do Mar* or CIRM], established in 1974, was given a larger remit under the framework of the Blue Amazon concept, coordinating matters related to the achievement of the National Policy for the Resources of the Sea [*Política Nacional para os Recursos do Mar* or PNRM], established in 2005. The main mission of the CIRM is to develop activities aimed at the exploration and exploitation of biological, mineral, and energy resources of the *territorial sea*, the EEZ, and the *continental shelf*.

Conducting a survey of the Brazilian continental shelf was particularly important with regard to Brazil's foreign policy towards the South Atlantic. The information gained as a result of the continental survey reinforced the need for Brazilian oceanographic research and for the country's pioneering efforts in South Atlantic international cooperation. Brazil has exported the knowledge and expertise it gained from the continental shelf survey to neighbouring countries in South America and Africa. This has promoted maritime awareness in Brazil's foreign policy, enhancing its potential through being more assertive in maritime collaboration. The Brazilian Navy has been a significant partner in

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16 Armando Amorim Ferreira Vidigal et al., *Amazônia Azul: o mar que nos pertence* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2006).  
17 See: <https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/revizee>

work conducted by Namibia, Angola, and Mozambique, offering guidelines for the conduct of their respective projects surveying the continental shelf.<sup>18</sup>

This international dimension of the Blue Amazon concept is relevant here. First, the idea of a Blue Amazon was possible only thanks to Brazilian diplomatic engagement with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), in order to assure the country's capacities on the sea. Second, Brazil's National Defence Strategy and National Defence Policy clearly define the boundaries of the strategic environment within which the country interacts diplomatically and strategically in terms of defence and security. The West coast of Africa is Brazil's natural maritime neighbour and the Blue Amazon concept would not be a realistic strategic communications tool without translating the ideas involved into coordinated diplomatic actions. Under the umbrella of international cooperation in defence diplomacy and in conjunction with the IMO, Brazil hosted a number of seminars on strengthening awareness of the maritime domain and on maritime surveillance, monitoring, and communication systems in the South Atlantic, helping African countries to improve the governance and protection of their own EEZs.<sup>19</sup> Brazil's turn towards West African countries, the neighbours of the Blue Amazon, has been translated into partnerships, joint operations and exercises, training missions, defence industry promotion, and several other defence diplomacy actions, in order to reinforce the concept of the Blue Amazon on an international level.<sup>20</sup>

In order to spread the idea of the Blue Amazon brand more widely and to promote maritime awareness at home and abroad, many educational initiatives have been implemented at the inter-ministerial level. Guided by the Brazilian Navy, the Ministry of Education has developed specific didactic materials for use in elementary schools, explaining the rationale behind the Blue Amazon concept and reinforcing the need for a national awareness of the maritime territory over which Brazil exercises sovereignty and exploratory rights.<sup>21</sup> The Brazilian Navy has also created a series of exhibitions at its Naval Museums and has made available to children educational materials and activities, such

18 Luiz Carlos Torres and Hundrsen de Souza Ferreira, 'Amazônia Azul: a fronteira brasileira no mar' in *Pas-sadigo*, (CAAML, 2005) pp. 3–5.

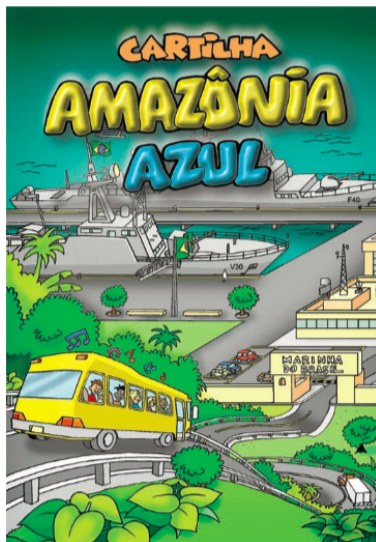
19 *Strengthening Maritime Security in West and Central Africa* (London: International Maritime Organization, 2017) p. 9.

20 Nathan Thompson and Robert Muggah, 'The Blue Amazon. Brazil Asserts its Influence Across the Atlantic', *Foreign Affairs*, 11 June 2015.

21 Here we have an example of educational materials produced by the Ministry of Education for use in primary and secondary school geography classes: [http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/EnsMed/expensgeo\\_1e2.pdf](http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/EnsMed/expensgeo_1e2.pdf)

as theatre plays and performances, always seeking to enhance their maritime awareness based on the Blue Amazon idea.

The comics below are examples of teaching materials produced to educate children and young people about the Blue Amazon. In these comics, a group of students and their teacher visit a Navy ship and learn about the importance and value of the Blue Amazon. Such comics are distributed at schools during visits of Navy personnel or passed out to school classes visiting ships berthed in some cities.



*Figure. 1 An educational publication designed to introduce schoolchildren to the 'Blue Amazon'*



*Figure. 2 A page introducing children to the Blue Amazon concept as it is displayed on maps*

The Navy Social Communication Centre, responsible for editing the institution's official webpage, commissioned informative videos which it made available on YouTube; their materials attracted a significant number of views.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The YouTube video *Amazônia Azul*, published by Marinha do Brasil had received 21,941 visits by 14 September 2019.

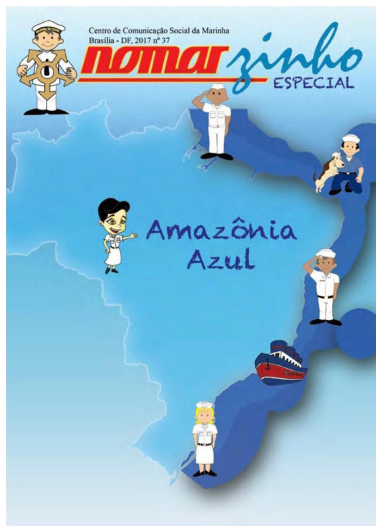


Figure 3. Normazinho № 37

The same Centre also produced a children's play kit called *Normazinho*, with topics related to maritime themes and the Blue Amazon as a recurrent subject. In all this material, the Navy insists on depicting a map of Brazil that includes the EEZ as a way of promoting the symbolic construction of this space. The cover of *Normazinho* № 37 depicts sailors on the sea, together with a ship, giving a real sense of Brazilian presence in this space (see Figure 3).

All of these initiatives fall into a broad spectrum of strategic communications, each playing an important role in building Brazil's national maritime awareness, including

Brazil's maritime and naval capacity within a grand strategy framework. But can it be demonstrated that Blue Amazon is more than a communication brand, that it in fact reflects a strategic concept?

### From Brand to Strategic Concept

To demonstrate this, let's turn to Geoffrey Till's classic book, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*. Till's concepts are instrumental to the argument presented here and provide evidence that the Brazilian Navy is using the name Blue Amazon to conceptualise a grand maritime strategy for Brazil.

Till gives a very specific definition of seapower: 'Seapower is not simply about what it takes to use the sea (although that is obviously a prerequisite). It is also the capacity to influence the behaviour of other people or things by what one does at or from the sea.'<sup>23</sup> The Blue Amazon concept is a conscious attempt to influence the strategic decision-making that has the potential to create the national maritime awareness required to assert Brazil as a seapower. Moreover,

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-first Century*. 4<sup>th</sup> edn revised and updated. (London: Routledge, 2018) p. 25.



the work conducted by Brazil in surveying its continental shelf has definitely influenced the behaviour of other actors internationally in relation to Brazil's capabilities and intentions in its use of the sea.

Till argues that a country's identity as a seapower is based on four ways of using the sea: 'as a resource'; 'as a medium of transportation and exchange'; 'as a medium of information and the spread of ideas'; and 'as a medium of domination'.<sup>24</sup> The Brazilian Navy strategically constructs its responsibilities in the maritime space in what it calls four Aspects of the Blue Amazon [*quatro Vertentes da Amazônia Azul*]: *the economic aspect*, or the exploitation and sustainable use of living and non-living resources; *the environmental aspect*, which refers to the rational use of the sea and the preservation of the environment; *the scientific aspect*, which deals with knowledge; and *the aspect of sovereignty*, in the sphere of security and defence.<sup>25</sup> These strands correspond, *mutatis mutandis*, to Till's ways of conceptualising use of the sea, not in the sense of a direct and translatable correspondence, but they may be understood as background for the argument presented here.

### The Economic Aspect

More than 95% of Brazilian foreign trade is transported by sea—a figure seldom made known to the Brazilian population. Although 80% of the country's population lives a short distance from the coast, in striking counterpoint to the immense size of the country, the general population knows little about the economic and strategic importance of Brazil's maritime transportation/trade routes. The country's heavy dependence on the sea means that this is also a potential vulnerability; Brazil requires a strong navy to ensure control of its maritime trade routes.

Despite its overwhelming reliance on maritime transportation for its economy, Brazil still relies heavily on foreign-flagged vessels to transport its sea-freight. The country will need to make significant investments in building a strong merchant marine, which will consequently create jobs and reduce the burden of costly payments to foreign corporations.

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<sup>24</sup> Till, *Seapower*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Júlio Soares de Moura Neto, José Roberto Bueno Junior, and Armando de Moura Ferraz, *Amazônia Azul - A Última Fronteira* (Brasília: Centro de Comunicação Social da Marinha, 2013).



Brazil is also heavily dependent on offshore oil exploration; its gas and oil reserves are another great economic resource coming from the Blue Amazon. The country has two major offshore oil producing areas—the Campos Basin and the Santos Basin. Eighty-seven percent of Brazilian oil comes from the ocean within its EEZ. Eleven percent of this is pumped from depths of 400 meters or less; 30% comes from depths between 400 and 1,000 meters; and the largest amount, close to 46%, comes from deep waters below 1,000 meters. Brazil has developed complex technologies to explore for oil below 1,000 meters, which is how exploration is conducted in the Santos Basin, a pre-salt oil field. Oil and gas are currently being extracted from or near the following sea basins: Foz do Amazonas, Pará-Maranhão, Barreirinhas, Ceará-Potiguar, Sergipe-Alagoas, Camamu and Almada, Jequitinhonha, Espírito Santo, Campos, Santos, and Pelotas. To transform that into numbers, Brazil's proven oil reserves (both land and sea) amounted to 11 957 billion barrels in 2018, with onshore production being less than 3% of this total.<sup>26</sup>

Fishing is another economic potential of the Blue Amazon. The Brazilian coast is fiercely sought after by industrial fishing vessels from various countries. This massive fishing industry was indeed the reason for one of the few international crises that Brazil had to face in its maritime space in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—an episode that came to be known as the Lobster War. This diplomatic-military crisis occurred in 1961–63, when French fishermen practiced lobster fishing near Brazilian territorial waters. When approached by Brazilian Navy ships and warned to withdraw, the French fishing vessels refused to comply. Even worse, the French government sent warships to escort and protect them. This crisis led the Brazilian government to employ coercive naval persuasion, sending Brazilian Navy ships to the crisis site in order to demonstrate clearly that the country was willing to defend its rights.<sup>27</sup> The crisis was finally resolved through diplomacy.<sup>28</sup>

This episode occurred before UNCLOS entered into force, but it already demonstrated the extent to which Brazil's seapower, as defined by Till, was put to the test by France. From the perspective of strategic communications,

26 Ministério de Minas e Energia do Brasil, *Plano Decenal de Expansão de Energia 2027* (Brasília: Ministério de Minas e Energia. Empresa de Pesquisa Energética MME/EPE, 2018) p. 133.

27 At that time, Brazil had defined its territorial waters as reaching 3 nautical miles from the coast. There was no consensus among the states about this distance; that came only after UNCLOS III. The problem in this episode is related to the legitimacy of extracting resources from the continental shelf, as the concept of EEZ had not yet been established.

28 Cláudio da Costa Braga, *A Guerra da Lagosta*. (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço de Documentação da Marinha-SDM, 2004).

this episode supports the argument that the Blue Amazon concept is strategic; Blue Amazon communicates to a broader audience the importance of having a strong Navy with the capability of responding to crises such as the Lobster War.

In order to identify sites of strategic and geo-economic interest on the high seas of the South and Equatorial Atlantic, Brazil created in 2009 the Program for the Prospecting and Exploration of Mineral Resources in the Equatorial and South Atlantic International Area [*Programa de Prospecção e Exploração de Recursos Minerais da Área Internacional do Atlântico Sul e Equatorial* or PROAREA]. Several national institutions together with the Brazilian Navy Admiral Paulo Moreira Institute of Sea Studies [*Instituto de Estudos do Mar Almirante Paulo Moreira* or IEAPM]<sup>29</sup> have conducted a number of studies on marine life, exploring not only the potential for economic exploitation, but also the conservation of maritime biodiversity.

### The Environmental Aspect

Blue Amazon programmes and projects aimed at the integrated management of coastal and marine environments have been mainly concerned with investment in alleviating the harmful effects of pollution, in urban revitalisation, in developing new activities, such as ecotourism and environmental education, and in maintaining environmental quality. Many of these programmes serve as platforms for scientists to provide their input on policy reform. They have improved Brazil's capacity to prevent disaster and have provided a better understanding of the rapid change in socioeconomic dynamics in recent decades. The programmes have also made appropriate environmental technologies available and have implemented the use of international environmental quality indicators.

The Blue Amazon strategy, including maintaining biological diversity, reconciling competing interests in marine and coastal areas, investing in sustainable activities, and sharing the benefits from the use of maritime resources fairly, has promoted cooperation with other countries through multilateral and international events. Some important initiatives have already taken place, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), signed during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which entered into force on 29 December 1993.

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<sup>29</sup> See the website of [Instituto de Estudos do Mar Almirante Paulo Moreira](#).

The ultimate goals of this convention were ‘the conservation of biological diversity’, ‘the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity’, and ‘the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources’. As concerns what would come to be called the Blue Amazon, it aimed to achieve a good ecological status of the marine environment and to give sea-dependent activities predictability and security.<sup>30</sup>

Regarding the safety of navigation in waters under national jurisdiction, Brazil approved the Water Traffic Safety Law [*Lei de Segurança do Transporte Aquaviário* or LESTA], Law № 9.537/97, which established concepts and rules of behaviour for the safety of sea-going vessels, excluding warships. Shipping safety and environmental standards are actually the subject of a number of conventions, codes, and resolutions adopted by the IMO. The Commander of the Navy in his role as the Brazilian Maritime Authority is responsible for regulating and controlling waterway transport in matters related to navigation safety, the safeguarding of human life at sea, and the protection of the marine environment. The Maritime Authority acts as a representative of the Brazilian government in international fora addressing these issues. The standards are managed by the Directorate of Ports and Coasts, the Brazilian Navy organisation that advises sea users on safe navigation, safeguarding human life at sea, and preventing pollution of the environment and waters.

The islands and sea cliffs of the Blue Amazon are also of strategic importance. In these places, the Brazilian Navy has installed an efficient navigation safety system, composed of lighthouses, weather stations, and communication centres, thus benefiting national and international navigation.

Given the importance of oil exploration and the transportation of oil through Brazilian territorial waters, the Maritime Authority must act in conjunction with other environmental agencies to control the oil industry nationally to ensure that environmental damage is prevented or, if it does occur, contained. Alongside industry, NGOs, and other government agencies, the Brazilian Navy has been influencing policy makers and practitioners, promoting maritime awareness under the umbrella of the Blue Amazon concept to consolidate perception of the importance of the sea for Brazil’s grand strategy.

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30 The Convention on Biological Diversity is a part of the United Nations Environment Programme.

## The Scientific Aspect

The National Policy for Sea Resources (PNRM), was the starting point for the scientific programmes associated with the exercise and guarantee of Brazilian sovereignty at sea. There are three major plans coordinated by the Inter-ministerial Commission for the Resources of the Sea (CIRM),<sup>31</sup> directly related to the Blue Amazon: the aforementioned Continental Shelf Survey Plan (LEPLAC), the National Coastal Management Plan [*Plano Nacional de Gerenciamento Costeiro* or PNGC], and the Sectoral Plan for Sea Resources (PSRM). The programmes and actions of these three plans focus on knowledge of the marine environment and its preservation, the rational use of resources, and the education of specialised personnel.

## The Aspect of Sovereignty

The Aspect of Sovereignty that comprises the fourth aspect of the Blue Amazon strategy is what Till would call seapower's input; 'the obvious inputs are navies, coastguards, the marine or civil-maritime industries broadly defined and, where relevant, the contribution of land and air forces'.<sup>32</sup> This is defined in Brazil's National Defence Policy and Strategy [*Política Nacional de Defesa/Estratégia Nacional de Defesa* or PND/END], which establishes that the Navy must have the capability to control maritime areas and to deny the use of the sea to intruders, as well as to determine what the naval power will focus on. The Navy's responsibilities include:

- increasing security and the ability to defend oil platforms, naval and port facilities, and archipelagos and oceanic islands in the Brazilian Jurisdictional Waters;
- responding promptly to any threat, by state or by unconventional or criminal forces, to maritime trade;
- and increasing participation in peacekeeping missions.

The PND/END also specifies the strategic maritime areas that control maritime access to Brazil and thus deserve special attention: the area between Santos and Vitória, and the area around the mouth of the Amazon river.

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<sup>31</sup> See: <https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/>

<sup>32</sup> Till, *Seapower*, p. 25.

Constitutionally, the Brazilian Navy is responsible for the naval defence and maritime security of the country. In fulfilling this mission, the Brazilian Navy develops a strategy of deterrence in peacetime through advertising the permanent readiness of the Naval Power, in order to discourage any aggression by state, non-state, or criminal forces.

The Brazilian Navy conducts various operations in areas of strategic interest for national defence in accordance with their assessment of potential threats posed to Brazilian sovereignty. The territory of the Blue Amazon is continuously monitored for possible conflicts arising in the South Atlantic. Even without explicit conflict, Brazil's immense coast line and geographical position in the South Atlantic require a Navy capable of reacting and responding to any possible threat to its sovereignty. The Navy also develops hydroceanographic activities to better understand environmental factors that affect Naval operations.

As previously mentioned, maritime security is a subsidiary mission of the Brazilian Navy. Maritime security is understood as the absence of threat in the maritime space. In peacetime, maritime security assures the good use of the seas. In this context, a number of 'new threats' are of great concern to the international community, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, illicit arms trafficking, smuggling, human trafficking, and piracy; these threats also inform the strategic thinking around the projection of the Blue Amazon concept. This has led to enhanced management and monitoring systems through information sharing and cooperation with other institutions and navies. As mentioned above, the Blue Amazon concept also justifies the modernisation of operational assets in the Brazilian Navy.

According to Till, maritime success requires 'an intimate relationship between maritime power and economic prosperity', 'an association of seapower and trading values', 'policy moderation', and 'controllability'.<sup>33</sup> For Brazil, economic prosperity is directly related to its maritime power; it is not possible to imagine Brazil as a seapower without it having an intrinsic and direct relationship with trade. Therefore, the country needs a robust and modern naval force, capable of guaranteeing policy moderation and exercising deterrence, in order to exert control over its maritime space.

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<sup>33</sup> Till, *Seapower*, p. 17.

The Blue Amazon concept goes beyond that of a mere a brand or promotional campaign. It has, in fact, provoked Brazilians to change their attitude towards the sea. According to Marianne Wiesebron: ‘The Brazilian Navy is not just building the Blue Amazon, rethinking the South Atlantic national security and all the challenges that arise from these issues: it wants Brazil to find its maritime vocation again.’<sup>34</sup>

In Till’s words, the constituents of a seapower are ‘maritime community’, ‘maritime people (professionals)’, ‘maritime geography’, and ‘maritime economy.’<sup>35</sup> The Blue Amazon as an instrument of strategic communications has created a national maritime awareness, within both the Brazilian government and Brazilian society, and has projected this idea internationally.

The combination of a strategic understanding of the potential uses of the sea, the clear definition of strategic priorities for Brazil’s maritime space, and a coherent and creative correlation with the Green Amazon, makes the Blue Amazon concept an efficient tool of strategic communications.

### Possible side effects

The Blue Amazon has immense potential as a strategic communications tool. However, some possible side effects must be considered when images of the Green Amazon are transposed onto the maritime space.

In an article entitled ‘The Threats on the Green Amazon and the Blue Amazon’,<sup>36</sup> Moreira has already started to address the problems that this transposition may yield. The main problem, from my perspective, is that because of its global relevance and potential, the Blue Amazon can be framed as belonging to the global commons, and therefore not subject to Brazilian sovereignty.

The Green Amazon has historically been targeted by many groups and countries as a universal good, claiming that access to it should not be restricted under Brazilian sovereignty or that of any other country. Carlos Nobre and Juan Carlos Castilla-Rubio, in an article entitled ‘The Amazon’s New Industrial Revolution’, propose what they call a ‘new development model’ for Amazonia,

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34 Marianne Wiesebron, ‘Amazônia Azul: Pensando a defesa do território marítimo brasileiro’, *Austral: Revista Brasileira de Estratégia e Relações Internacionais*, Vol 2, № 3 (Jan/Jun 2013): 124.

35 Till, *Seapower*, pp. 110–12.

36 Alexandre Santana Moreira, ‘As Ameaças sobre a Amazônia Verde e a Amazônia Azul: uma relação possível?’, *Revista da Escola de Guerra Naval*, Vol. 23, № 1 (Jan/Apr 2017): 239–74.

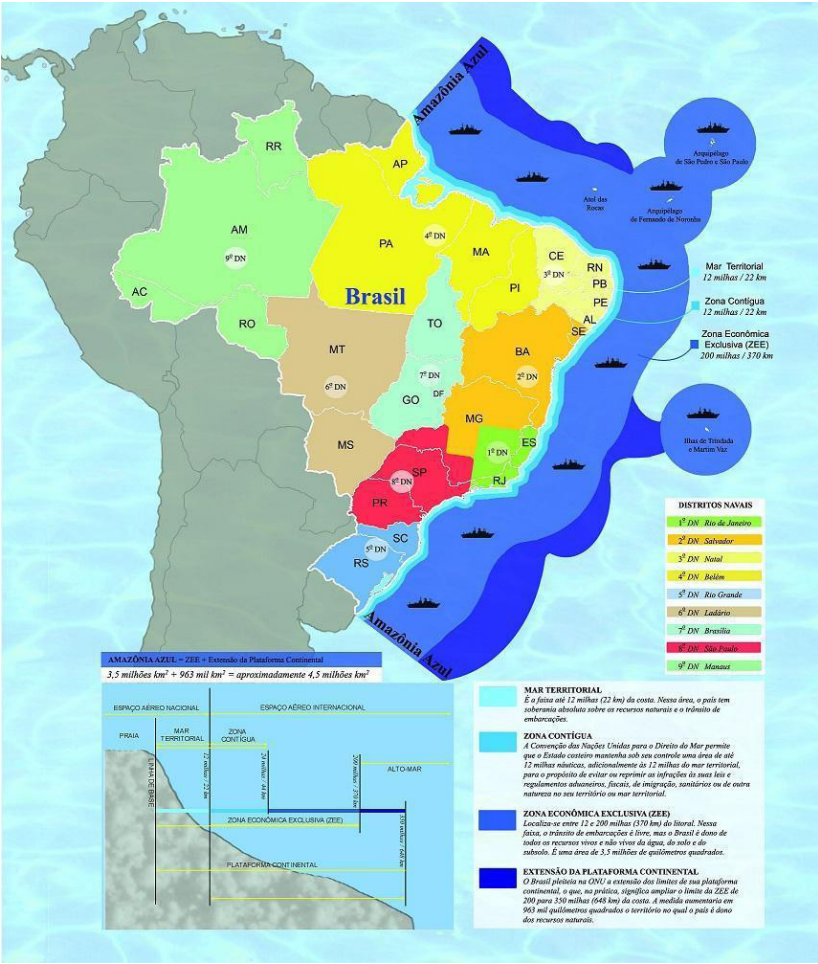
listing the region's many potential resources and benefits—the same things that make Brazilians proud of their Amazonia. They start their article by stating: 'The Amazon system exemplifies the global commons on which the health and stability of the planet depends.'<sup>37</sup> They promote the unquestionability of the assumption that the region belongs to a global commons.

This particular discourse is normally used when the economic potential of the region is addressed in combination with Brazil's ability to conserve and protect the environment. The July/August 2019 fires in the Brazilian Amazonia have rekindled this discussion, pointing to Brazil's inability to protect the forest or disinterest in conserving it, further provoking suggestions of international intervention that would threaten Brazilian sovereignty over the region. On 31 August 2019, Prof. Lawrence Douglas published an article in the British newspaper *The Guardian* entitled 'Do the Brazil Amazon Fires Justify Environmental Interventionism?' He argues in favour of the international community intervening in any situation where the global commons are at risk.<sup>38</sup> Any incident in the Blue Amazon could easily trigger the same discourse.

The second problem is a Naval operational one, which derives from the image that the Brazilian Navy might unintentionally create. Presenting itself as having a duty to safeguard its territorial waters, to protect the Blue Amazon, the Brazilian Navy may end up creating an image of itself as a constabulary Navy, and not as a Navy with the intention and capability of operating beyond the borders of its territorial sea and EEZ. In other words, it may end up reinforcing an image of Brazil as an isolated country, instead of a seapower. Many maps of the Blue Amazon, such as *Map 2* below, depict Navy ships only within the territory of the Blue Amazon. This suggests that Brazil is capable of controlling and securing only its territorial waters and EEZ. Again, such images contradict any discourse of Brazil as a seapower.

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37 Carlos Nobre and Juan Carlos Castilla-Rubio, 'The Amazon's New Industrial Revolution', *Global Environment Facility*, 16 December 2016.

38 Lawrence Douglas, 'Do the Brazil Amazon Fires Justify Environmental Interventionism?', *The Guardian*, 31 August 2019. [Accessed 1 September 2019]



Map 2. Blue Amazon and the Brazilian Navy district division<sup>40</sup>

39 Source: <https://www.marinha.mil.br/amazonia-azul>



## Conclusion

The Brazilian Navy's master instrument of strategic communications was the semantic appropriation of a concept already deeply rooted in the Brazilian identity. By transposing the value of the Green Amazon onto a Blue Amazon, Brazil aims to promote maritime awareness among the Brazilian population, support its national maritime strategy, and develop its grand strategy. The Blue Amazon concept as a strategic communications tool corresponds precisely to what Farwell says about using words, actions, images, and symbols to direct behaviour and policies.<sup>40</sup> Or, in the words of the White House, it is a precise 'synchronization of words and deeds'.<sup>41</sup>

The Blue Amazon concept has allowed the Brazilian Navy to engage the imagination of the Brazilian people and inform them about the relevance of the sea to the national economy, to national development, and to the country's projection of power. The Navy is using this communicative tool to create an awareness of the importance of having naval assets capable of responding to any issue regarding defence and security in the region. It is difficult to measure effectively the success of this strategic communications initiative, as it directly transforms the historical view of Brazil commonly understood by the general public, pushing the country to assert itself as a seapower.

Finally, the Blue Amazon concept seems to represent an effective strategic communications tool with the potential to support a more robust maritime strategy. Its effectiveness will be proven by its success in reframing a national grand strategy that seeks to make Brazil identify itself as a maritime nation and a seapower. The Blue Amazon is presented as a shared understanding, not only as a national brand. It is important to remember that, to be effective and convincing, this kind of shared social construction should transcend the verisimilitude of its message.

Returning to Lambert,<sup>42</sup> what we are seeing through the use of the concept of Blue Amazon is the Brazilian Navy deliberately shaping a maritime culture that reflects the economic, strategic, political, scientific, and environmental potential of the sea. More than simply trying to prove that it has power at sea, Brazil is

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<sup>40</sup> Farwell, *The Art of Strategic Communication*.

<sup>41</sup> Biden and Pelosi, *National Framework for Strategic Communication*.

<sup>42</sup> Lambert, *Seapower States*, p. 4–13.

using the concept of Blue Amazon to frame itself as a seapower, at least within its home strategic environment, the South Atlantic.

Basing its Blue Amazon strategy on the economic, environmental, scientific, and sovereignty aspects of its rights and responsibilities in its maritime territories, the Brazilian Navy targets a broader audience, intending to promote a change in perception of the sea, and consequently in the prevailing towards about it. In other words, the holistic strategy that the Blue Amazon concept communicates has the potential for creating a cultural change in the Brazilian mentality, which if it does not succeed in catapulting Brazil into the category of a 'seapower state', as Lambert describes it, at least makes Brazil understand that it is a 'maritime nation'.

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