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Rethinking the geopolitics of Latin America. Is necessary a geopolitical study of South America?

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Rethinking the geopolitics of Latin America. Is necessary a geopolitical study of South America?

Abstract:

There has been a significant change in US policy toward Latin America. Obama has surprised with certain diplomatic moves that suggest that he has taken the initiative: The announcement of the Secretary of State John Kerry that the old "Morroe Doctrine" is neglected and the resumption of diplomatic relations with Cuba are two clear examples.

On the other hand, the upcoming US elections, the recent elections and referendum in South America, possible peace agreements in Colombia, the slowdown of the Chinese economy, and the recession result of this slowdown in much of the subcontinent countries, suggest to think about changes. The old, the Bolivarian hegemony is declining, but the new, whose true identity remains unknown, has not surface yet. While some insist on going to the past, others hope to those who have not yet arrived.

Keywords:

Geopolitics, South America, Monroe Doctrine, Cuba, Brazil, UNASUR, MERCOSUR, ALBA, Pacific Alliance, China

Introduction

In 2010 I wrote an article published in a monograph of CESEDEN, where I contemplate if a geopolitical study of Latin America was necessary. The coming to power of Barak Obama as president of the United States, and his change of approach to the rest of the world, growing apart from his predecessor George W Bush was apparently - at that time – a sufficient reason for me.

At the 2009 Summit of the Americas, a few months after he assumed the presidency, Obama stated¹:

This Summit offers the opportunity for a new beginning. The advance in prosperity, security and freedom for the people of America depends on a "partnership" of the 21st century, freed from the attitudes of the past ... However, this will take some time. Nothing is going to happen from one day to the next.

And I finished my article with a paragraph extracted from other article of Mesa Gisbert:

Nowadays, the United States has decided to change its role in the region for the first time, since it concerned about the interests and excesses on the continent in the 19th century. Latin America has to demonstrate that it can build its future in a "sovereign", not in an isolated way. What should we divest ourselves of? We should divest ourselves of the pendular logic, the ideological rhetoric of extremes, the zero year temptation of the Revolution and, above all, of the messianism. We need fewer manifest destinies and a more quotidian construction of instruments that give us discipline, order, sense of civic responsibility, a clear connection between the State and the society, this has only one name: tribute, and a single concept: reciprocity from the State to the taxpayer. ²

Obama kept his word; in fact he did not give excessive importance to the continent until almost the last year of his term.

For the French professor, Ybes Lacoste, all geopolitical reasoning, in order to be global, must be carried out based on different levels of spatial analysis, from the planetary level (with sets that are measured in thousands of kilometers) to the levels that are measured, in certain cases, in some hundreds or even tens of meters.

However, as Lacoste maintains, the geopolitical reasoning must also take into account events that have been developed previously, more or less far away in time,

¹ *Cumbre de las Américas en Puerto de España, Trinidad y Tobago 17-19 abril de 2009*; The White House Remarks by the President at the Summit of Americas Opening Ceremony, Abril 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-Summit-of-the-Americas-Opening-Ceremony/

² AMÉRICA LATINA DENTRO DEL PÉNDULO. Carlos Mesa Gisbert. FP *Edición española*. Febrero-marzo 2010

as well as more or less false or exact ideas that the political leaders of a distant great power have built.³

There has been a noticeable change in US policy towards Latin America. Some perceived this change as an abandonment of the region, when applying the pivot strategy towards the Pacific. Nevertheless, in the last years of his term, Obama has surprised with certain diplomatic moves that suggest that he is not only willing to fulfill his promises, but he has picked up the initiative again. Two clear examples are the announcement of the Secretary of State John Kerry's about the withdrawal of the "Monroe Doctrine" and the resumption of diplomatic relations with Cuba.

The analysis that we propose should be based on geography, since geography in the subcontinent of South America is an important determinant of its geopolitics, but it must also contemplate the behavior of the great powers outside the region, particularly of the United States, but also of China. Each of them presents a different worldview and different interests, although not always incompatible. We will also focus on Brazil and on some regional organizations of diverse nature, but with influence over it.

Two concepts of geopolitics

"Geopolitics conceives the state as a geographic organism or as a phenomenon in space," Rudolf Kjellen (Sweden, 1864-1922),

Geopolitics is not a static reality like geography. It is in slow but permanent evolution. As Kattalin Gabriel-Oyhamburu states⁴, geopolitics depends on the historical moment in which it occurs. For a long time it has been associated with the state and the principle of national sovereignty, but it is now being reformulated the scarcity of energy, water and food resources, largely linked to access to the markets of emerging countries, has restructured the global architecture and has introduced new geopolitical priorities.

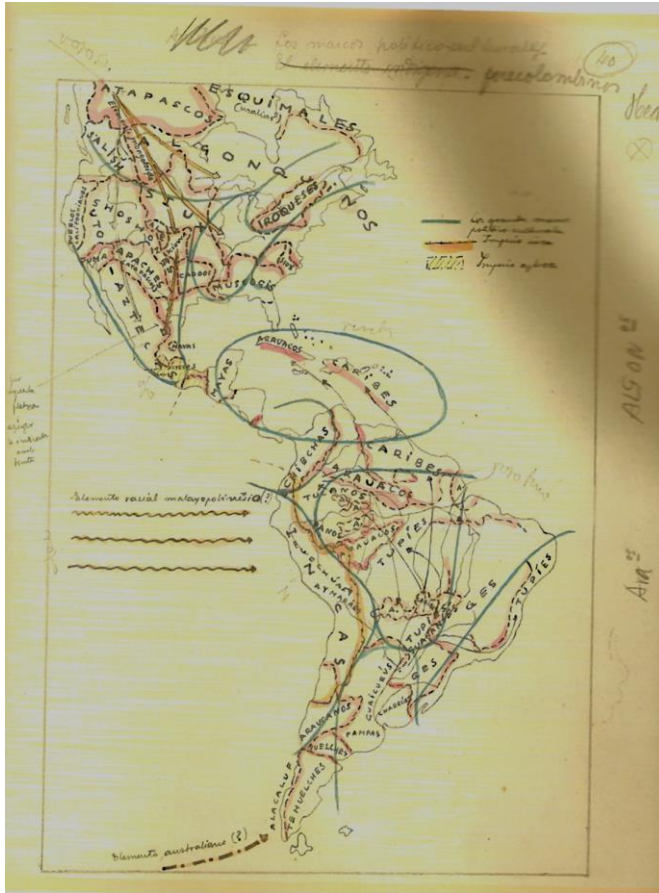
³ Lacoste, Y. (2011). Del razonamiento geográfico, táctico y estratégico al razonamiento geopolítico: los comienzos de Hérodote. Geopolítica(s). Revista de estudios sobre espacio y poder, vol. 2, núm. 2, 339-342.

⁴ Gabriel-Oyhamburu, K. (Septiembre de 2010). Le retour d'une géopolitique des ressources ? Recuperado el 25 de marzo de 2014, de L'espacepolitique: <http://espacepolitique.revues.org/1796>

The United States and the geopolitics of power and the hegemony

Lacoste, one of those responsible of the conceptual evolution of geopolitics and the founder of the magazine *Hérodote* Yves, defines Geopolitics as:

“The term "Geopolitics", used nowadays in multiple ways, in practice designates everything related to rivalries for power or influence over certain territories and their



populations: rivalries between political powers of all types, not only between states, also between more or less clandestine political movements or armed groups, and rivalries for the control or possession of territories of greater or lesser extent. Geopolitical reasoning helps to understand better the causes of this or that conflict, within a country or between states, as well as it helps to consider the consequences of these struggles between countries that are more or less distant and sometimes even in different parts of the world.”⁵

And Arendt states:

"Ultimately, power is the ability to get the desired results. Power does not need justification, as it is inherent in the very existence of political communities, but what it needs

legitimacy ... Violence can be justifiable, but it will never be legitimized ... No one questions violence in self-defense, because the danger is not only clear, but is also present, and the end as justification of the means is immediate. "6

According to Gearoid O. Tuathail, geopolitics refers to the power and the hegemony with its dual components of domination and consent. In this sense, the geography of the world is not a neutral construction of nature, but rather the result of the competence of the powers about the organization, occupation and administration of space.⁷

⁵ Lacoste, Y. (2006). ¿qué es la Geopolitica? Herodote, 7-26.

⁶ Arendt, H. (1970). *On Violence*,. Nueva York y Londres: Harcourt, Inc.

⁷ Tuathail, G. O. (1996). *Critical Geopolitics*. Minneapolis:: University of Minnesota Press.

From Nicolas Spykman to George Kennan

Nicolas Spykman gives great importance to the radical separation between the America of the Anglo-Saxons and the America of the Latins, and proposes to divide the "Latin world" into two regions. The first one would include Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, as well as Colombia and Venezuela, known as the "Mediterranean" America; and the other one, would include all South America, under Colombia and Venezuela.⁸ According to Spykman any threat to the American hegemony in Latin America would have to come from the South.

The countries situated outside our immediate zone of supremacy, in other words, the great states of South America (Argentina, Brazil and Chile) can try to neutralize our power through a common action or through the use of influence from outside the hemisphere. A threat to American hegemony in this region of the hemisphere (the ABC region) will have to be responded through war.

Spykman developed the Theory of the "Security Perimeter", as the first and last line of defense of US global hegemony.⁹ According to Spykman, Latin America must become an area of containment of extra-continental rivals through a Pan-American market and defense agreements.¹⁰



In a report submitted by Kennan after a trip to Latin America in February and March of 1950 and that has recently been declassified by the Secretary of State, he gave his opinion about the military importance of the countries of Latin America:

The military importance of the Latin American countries for us is rather nowadays to the extent that we depend on them for the obtaining of essential materials for the continuation of a war, and more important insofar as the attitudes of the people of Latin America could influence the general political

⁸ FIORI, J. L. (24 de noviembre de 2007). Nicholas Spykman e a América Latina. Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil.

⁹ The cited perimeter would cover from the Bering Strait to Hawaii. From there goes to the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), Easter Island (Chile) and after crossing the Channel of Magellan goes to the Malvinas. From the Falklands it ascends to the Azores (Portugal), in the Center of Atlantic and it is projected until Iceland, returning by the North Pole until the Strait of Bering.

¹⁰ Fiori, J. L. (septiembre de 2009). EUA, América del Sur y Brasil: seis tópicos para una discusión. Recuperado el 25 de julio de 2014, de Amersur: <http://www.amersur.org.ar/PolInt/Fiori0909.htm>

evolution of the international community.

The recognition of Cuba

The logic of the Cold War imbued the Latin American perceptions about security and defense and defined in a very precise manner the "missions" of the armed forces of the region. The "National Security Doctrine" overlapped the concept of security of the nineteenth-century, based on national sovereignty, territorial integrity and maintenance of the internal order. Consequently, the social and political changes were considered attempts at infiltration and communist subversion.

If defense against the "foreign enemy" was assumed by the United States, the struggle against the "internal enemy" was one of the primary functions of the national armed forces in almost all countries of Latin America. The anti-subversive war was the immediate result of the Doctrine of National Security, and the fight against communism, helped to justify the breakdown of the democratic order and the military dictatorship.

There are some constants of the US policy towards the region that have remained intact despite the end of the Cold War. According to Blanco¹¹, the most significant one has been the continuation of a "Cold War" perspective with regard to Cuba. This behavior could not be explained by the potential threat that Cuba could represent after the disappearance of the Soviet Union, but it could be explained by internal reasons in the US policy related to the migratory issue and to the lobby that the Cubans against Castro that live in the United States maintain in the Congress.

There are some constants of US policy towards the region that have remained intact despite the end of the Cold War. For Blanco, the most significant has been the permanence of a Cold War perspective with Cuba. This behavior could not be explained by the potential threat posed by Cuba after the disappearance of the Soviet Union, but for internal reasons in US policy related to the migratory issue and the lobby held by Congress against Cuban anti-Castro Resident in the United States.

If 2015 was a decisive year in the relations between the United States and Cuba with the resumption of diplomatic relations and the opening of embassies, it is expected that 2016 will be a year in which we will have to face the difficult problems that still pending. Among these problems we can underline migration, with thousands of Cubans trying to reach the United States, and the economic future of Cuba, now that its preferential agreement about oil with Venezuela seems to be active, after the victory of the opposition in the congressional elections in Venezuela. For Cubans, the most important thing is to get the lifting of the embargo, a complex proposal in a difficult year for the US.

¹¹ Blanco, D. (1998). FUERZAS ARMADAS Y SEGURIDAD REGIONAL EN AMÉRICA LATINA. Revista Venezolana de Análisis de Coyuntura, IV(2), 163-188.

The Obamas administration is coming to an end, and Cubans know that their window of opportunity is limited, and that after the end of Obama's term, things could change drastically.

The end of the Monroe doctrine era

In the first days of our republic, the United States made a decision about its relationship with Latin America. President James Monroe, who was also a former Secretary of State, declared that the United States unilaterally, and as a fait accompli, would act as protector of the region. The doctrine that bears its name enforces its authority in order to intervene and oppose the influence of European powers in Latin America. And throughout our nation's history (United States), successive presidents have strengthened this doctrine and made a similar decision.¹²

The Monroe Doctrine served as a legitimizing tool during the first century of US intervention abroad. Until World War I, US foreign policy interests were mostly concentrated in Latin America. The cited doctrine warned European states about the intervention in the American continent. From the Monroe Doctrine derives the doctrine of "manifest destiny", which is carried out using 2 basic strategies:

- The export of the US model.
- The exclusivity of action of the United States on the continent.

Both Admiral Mahan and President Roosevelt based their ideas on the Monroe Doctrine. Mahan in his book *The influence of sea power upon history*, joins for the first time the concept of "national interest" with Ibero-America:

"The national interest of the United States in the world, above ideologies, will be to settle and export its political model, as a result of our principles of freedom, for our natural continent, especially in the nearest territories, preserving it from damaging and worn-out interferences »¹³

With the *Big stick policy*, Roosevelt would pressure the Ibero-American countries, particularly the Caribbean, with an armed intervention based on the "right" of the United States to intervene in matters of other countries in defense of the interests of American citizens, in accordance with its own corollary of the Monroe Doctrine.

The most dramatic change in the opposite direction has come at a time when Middle East, Afghanistan and China seemed to monopolize US foreign policy. According to the Secretary of State John Kerry:

¹² Kerry, J. (2013). Remarks on U.S. Policy in the Western Hemisphere. Washington, DC: US Department of State.

¹³ Mahan, A. T. (1890). *The influence of sea power upon history*. Boston: Little, Brown and company.

However, nowadays we have made a different choice. The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over. The relationship that we seek and that we have worked hard to foster is not a statement from the United States about how and when it will intervene in the affairs of other American states. It is about that all our countries see each other as equals, sharing responsibilities, cooperating in security matters, and not adhering to the doctrine, but to the decisions that we take as partners to promote the values and interests that we share.¹⁴

Future role of the United States in South America

José Luís Fiori does not consider probable that the United States will renounce to what it has traditionally considered its three reasons to intervene and that have guided its hemispheric policy during the twentieth century:

- In case of an external threat;
- In case of economic disorder;
- In case of a threat to democracy and good governance.¹⁵

In this sense, Romney, the Republican candidate at that time, asserted in an article in the Wall Street Journal, that "the United States seemed to be at the mercy of events rather than shaping them" and promised to restore the traditional role of the US in the international scenario using military and economic power:

The responsibility of our president is to use the great American power to shape History - not to conduct it from the background; leaving our destiny to the mercy of events ... It is essential to have a strong America to shape events.¹⁶ (Holland, 2012)

Although it is still unclear who will be the Democratic and Republican candidates for the next presidential election, and both parties are engaged in a fierce internal fight for nomination, if the forecasts were met, and the candidates chosen were Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton, their possible political positions regarding Latin America will be very different:

Trump, as Romney, is committed to regain the greatness of America, with a series of initiatives that aimed to return employment opportunities at US ground, while American power would be present again throughout the world. Both policies affect Latin America as a whole. And even though it has not yet drafted a policy in relation the majority of Latin American countries, the generalization of its views on Mexico can be extrapolated to the rest (Fuentes, Garcia, & Roman, 2016)

¹⁴ Kerry, Obra citada

¹⁵ Fiori, J. L. (septiembre de 2009). EUA, América del Sur y Brasil: seis tópicos para una discusión. Recuperado el 25 de julio de 2014, de Amersur: <http://www.amersur.org.ar/Pollnt/Fiori0909.htm>

¹⁶ Holland, S. (13 de septiembre de 2012). Romney says U.S. seems "at the mercy of events" in world. Recuperado el 12 de octubre de 2012, de Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com>

Trump's foreign policy highlights the need to build a wall on the southern border of the United States. In turn, his domestic platform, stresses the rights of the Second Amendment, the major fiscal reforms and hostile immigration policies. Trump's hostility towards the countries of Latin America, specifically Mexico, a neighbor of the United States, would undoubtedly represent a major obstacle for the continent's prosperity if he wins the presidency. (Fuentes, Garcia, & Roman, 2016)

Hillary Clinton's views on foreign policy are diametrically opposite. Related to the debate between realists and idealists, on one hand, realists give preference to national security, and on the other hand, idealists give preference to human rights. She considers that these categorizations are too simplistic and that no one should have any illusions about the seriousness of the security threats that the United States faces, and that when she was Secretary of State, her greatest responsibility was to protect her citizens and her country.

However, at the same time, she considers important to uphold universal values and human rights, because are the core of what it means to be an American. Clinton states that if we sacrifice those values, or if our policies separated too much from our ideals, American influence will dissipate.

She is in favor of lifting immediately the embargo against Cuba and promoting relations with the BRICS countries. She also considers that the most intelligent strategy is peace. She supports Obama's new leadership concept. We can expect continuity, in line with Obama, but with more involvement in South America, in consistency with Bill Clinton's regional policy.

China and the geopolitics of resources

Nowadays, a new configuration of powers is reforming the international order; a world of a superpower and many great powers. Nationalism and the nation itself far from being weakened by globalization, has now returned to take revenge, ethnic nationalism has returned with force, but is more significant the return of nationalism of the great powers. Instead of a new world order, the conflicts of interests and ambitions of the great powers are producing again new alliances and counter-alliances, and an elaborate swap of "dance partners" , that any diplomat of the eleventh century would instantaneously recognize.¹⁷

¹⁷ Rosalie Chen. Journal of contemporary China 12.nº 35 (May 2003) p.287

Is there geopolitics of resources?

Geopolitics is not a fixed value, is a variable that describes the changes in the geographical distribution of the routes and of the natural and economic resources¹⁸.

The projection of the powers will increasingly depend on its policy of obtaining resources. We are in the presence of a new configuration: the superpowers feel more powerful in controlling these resources. This rivalry introduces new "places", geostrategic nodes, which are coveted by both the United States and China, which no longer seek to establish dominance in the "Heartland" or "Rimland". They seek to control using flexible strategies the areas of high production of resources.¹⁹

In this sense, Michael Klare stated in "The New Geopolitics",²⁰

I mean by geopolitics or geopolitical competition, the contest between great powers and contenders to great powers because of the control of territories, resources and important geographical positions, such as ports, canals, hybrid systems, oasis and other sources of wealth and influence.

The geographical distribution of resource centers and centers of lines of communication assigns value to each location in terms of its strategic importance. The idea of globalization supports the belief in a gradual reduction of the role of geography and geopolitics in the states, but the reality is that the exclusive control over routes and resources cannot be replaced by the "market". Thus, geography and geopolitics are as important nowadays as they were in the past.²¹

Relations between China and South America

The relations of China with South America have been based on the massive import of commodities. The biggest risk was the slowdown of the Chinas economy. This occurred along with the reduction of the demand of energy resources, which led to a recession that affects especially the great economies of the subcontinent: Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela.

In 2012, it was stated that the economies of China and Latin America and the Caribbean will grow in the following years two and three times faster than the industrialized economies. The economies of China, Latin America and the Caribbean were the poles of growth of the world at that time, since industrialized economies will have to adjust to a context of lower growth and higher unemployment

¹⁸Grygiel, J. J. (2006). Great Powers and Geopolitical Change. Baltimore: JHU Press.

¹⁹ Gabriel-Oyhamburu, K. (Septiembre de 2010). Le retour d'une géopolitique des ressources ? Recuperado el 25 de marzo de 2014, de L'espacepolitique: <http://espacepolitique.revues.org/1796>

²⁰ Klare, M. (2001). La nueva geopolítica. Revista de Economía, Sociedad y Cultura,, 109-15.

²¹ Grygiel, Obra citada.

in the following years.²² Therefore, we are confronted by an international environment that invites us to rethink global and regional alliance strategies and to give greater prominence to South-South connections in trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) and cooperation.

Nevertheless, it was also warned that the countries of the region should redouble their efforts to diversify their sales to China, incorporating to them more value and knowledge, in order to stimulate business, commercial and technological alliances with their peers in that country, and to promote Latin American investments in Asia and the Pacific that facilitate a greater regional presence in the Asian value chains, structured around China. Trade and investment ties between China and Latin America and the Caribbean have continued to expand.

China became a key trading partner for the region. It is already the major destination market for exports from Brazil and Chile, and the second one of the exports from Peru, Cuba and Costa Rica. It is also the third country among the main origins of imports from Latin America and the Caribbean, with a value that represents 13% of the total imports from the sub-region.²³

As *The Economist* states²⁴, China is the second largest economy in the world, whose gross domestic product accounts for almost 17% of the world economy. Some of the most influential economists and experts are betting that China will be the main figure of the next economic recession.

However, in 2015, the world economy continues to be unable to recover the growth levels that it registered before the global economic crisis of 2008-2009, when the US economy was the most dynamic among developed countries. China, which has registered one of the highest annual economic growth rates in the world during the period 2001-2010 (10.5% on average), since the beginning of 2012, started to decline until it reached 7.4% in 2014. This slowdown is due to lower export growth.

In response to the financial crisis of 2008, China promoted a huge increase in investment driven by debt to compensate for the weakness of external demand. However, the growth in the economy is slowing down, and the amount of capital needed to generate additional income has almost duplicated since the early 2000s.

²² Kuwayama, M., & Rosales V., O. (2012). China y América Latina y el Caribe: hacia una relación económica y comercial estratégica. CEPAL.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ ECONOMISTA, E. (13 de 01 de 2016). China sí importa y desencadenará la próxima 'Gran Recesión' económica. Recuperado el 07 de 03 de 2016, de ELECONOMISTA.ES: <http://www.eleconomista.es/economia/noticias/7276324/01/16/China-si-importa-y-desencadenara-la-proxima-Gran-Recesion-economica.html>

On the margin, it is probable that most of this investment is loss-making. The economy could fall into recession.²⁵ (Wolf, 2016)

What is needed, according to Martin Wolf²⁶ (Wolf, 2016) is an adjustment in the economic structure, with an investment based on falling credit of the investment and the increase of consumption as components of GDP. Nevertheless, investment share has slightly fallen, while debt has exploded and consumption remains at only 40 percent of GDP. In short, demand continues to depend on the growth of uneconomic investment, fueled by debt. The changes in the necessary economic structure in order to eliminate this dependence are simply not happening.

The growth of the region in the last decade is an accurate reflection of the fluctuations of the international economic context. Following the high growth recorded between 2003 and 2008 driven by a favorable external scenario, with an expanding world economy, high commodity prices are being recorded especially in South America. The activity expanded again in 2010 and 2011, driven by China's high growth and monetary policies of the United States. However, since 2012, there has been a marked slowdown of growth in the region²⁷ (Rosales, 2015).

Regional growth in 2014 was barely 1.1%, and ECLAC expects that regional growth will slow slightly in 2015. This projection is mainly explained because of the expected behavior of the great economies of South America (Argentina, Brazil and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). The value of the exports of South American will probably continue contracting as a result of a decline of the volume of exports, and particularly as a result of the lower prices of its main export commodities, due to a lower import demand in markets such as China and the European Union.²⁸ (Rosales, 2015)

Although the deceleration of exports has affected all sub-regions of the American continent, it has particularly affected South America, with an excessive dependence on raw materials exported to China and the EU. Wolf states that it would be important to find a new engine of demand. However, it is not clear that it will be achieved²⁹ (Rosales, 2015). The rest of the world is waiting for the US to provide the solution, but unfortunately this will not happen. The adjustment of an economy which is addicted to credit bubbles is going to be difficult to achieve.

The first temptation is to think of China as an antidote to get rid of America permanently.

²⁵ Wolf, M. (19 de 01 de 2016). China's great economic shift needs to begin. Recuperado el 07 de 03 de 2016, de THE FINANCIAL TIMES : <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/564c7490-bb8d-11e5-b151-8e15c9a029fb.html#>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Rosales, O. (2015). América Latina y el Caribe y China: Hacia una nueva era de cooperación económica . Santiago de Chile: CEPEDAL.

²⁸ Rosales, O. Obra citada

²⁹ Ibid

The second temptation is the biregional relationship, both the EU and China, are facing a fragmented Latin America, unable to reach consensus on any issue on the Latin American agenda.

The third temptation is to take advantage of the Chinese mana and the voracious, infinite and inexhaustible appetite of its markets. We can already see the consequences of the slowdown of the Chinese economy on commodity prices and their negative repercussions on regional economic growth.

The fourth and last great Latin American temptation is the critical dependence on its primary exports, primarily of food. The phenomenon associated with the constant increases in the Asian demand during the buoyant years was the “reprimarisation” of Latin American exports.³⁰ (Malamud, The Four Latin American Temptations in its Relationship with China, 2015)

South America

A continent in which the institutions are invented every five years, are dismembered every decade and do not work properly most of the time, can hardly achieve its



Illustration 1 South America according to Spykman



goals. “Ariadne’s thread”, is a story where we can find the greatest pain of all, what is women during the day, is unwomen at night and what is rewoven is in a different fabric.³¹

Geopolitics

Both history and geography, the constituent elements of geopolitics and strategy, determine how the world is observed and described in both, words and actions. This is so because “the way in which we describe the world, the words we use, shape how we see the world and how we decide to act”³²

The division proposed by Spykman

³⁰ Malamud, C. (17 de 05 de 2015). Las cuatro tentaciones latinoamericanas en su relación con China. Recuperado el 08 de 03 de 2016, de Infolatam: <http://www.infolatam.com/2015/05/17/las-cuatro-tentaciones-latinoamericanas-en-su-relacion-con-china/>

³¹ AMÉRICA LATINA DENTRO DEL PÉNDULO. Carlos Mesa Gisbert. FP *Edición española*. Febrero-marzo 2010

³² Kaldor, M. (1990). After the Cold War. *New Left Review* 80, March–April., 25–37.

between America-Mediterranean and South America, to the south of the 7th north parallel, has clearly geopolitical connotations and responds to a classic worldview of the United States. Within this geopolitical logic we could identify sub-regions:

BCA (Brazil, Chile, Argentina)

“Heart Zone” (Paraguay y Bolivia)

Pacific zone (Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia)

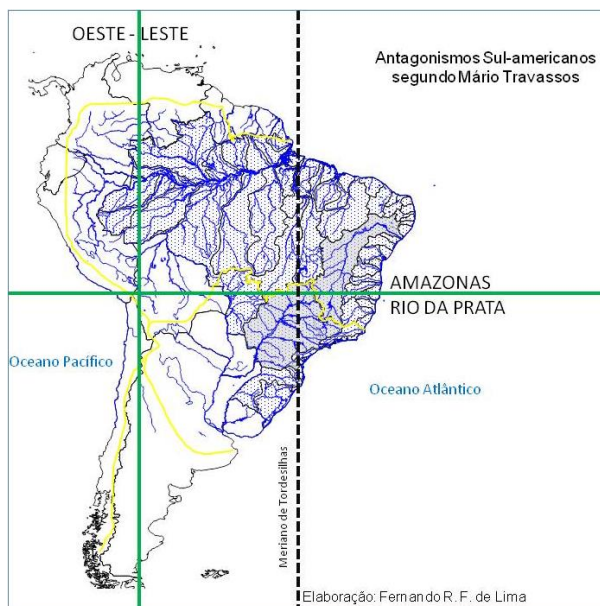


Illustration 4: Antagonisms in South America according to Mario Travassos

Atlantic zone (Brasil, Uruguay, Argentina)

As the great Brazilian Geopolitical Mario Travassos reminds us, when we consider as a group the economic and political phenomenon's that are carried out in the continent of South America and in the vicinity, the presence of two fundamental antagonisms in its vast and varied territory must be admitted, as the essential factors of the modalities in which the same phenomenon's appear.

Although, like all opposing forces, they have a certain separating

effect, combined they can be the true creative forces of everything that goes on in South America's political realms.

These antagonisms manifest themselves in different amplitudes: one, encompassing the whole continent, in its causes as well as in its effects, which is translated by the opposition of the two continental slopes, the one of the Atlantic and the one of the Pacific. Another one, directly interested in the Atlantic side, is the opposition of the two great basins located in it, the one of the Amazon and the one of the Silver, and can be easily verified with the naked eye on a geographic chart of the South America³³.

³³ Ibid

Geography

The subcontinent South America has a huge geographical variety, with influence on its geopolitics. We can divide South America into three large areas:

- **The mountain Range of the Andes** is the longest and highest mountain range of the world, after the Himalaya. It extends from the south of the “Tierra del Fuego”, following a parallel line to the Pacific coast, diversifying to the north in two arms, one towards the Isthmus of Panama and another one bordering the Caribbean coast. It passes through Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela.
- The lowlands are divided into three systems: the Orinoco plains, the plain of the Amazon and the plain of the Plata, formed by the sedimentation produced by the rivers that cross them.
- The continental shield (Guayanese Highlands, Patagonian massif and Brasilia massif).

Regional Blocs

If we understand regional bloc as the integration or association of different countries that share common interests in economic, social, political, environmental issues etc., and whose structure is tried to strengthen, in its construction, based on agreements, legislation that favor intra-block conditions and strengthen it from the external sphere, we find the following blocks of interest for our study:



UNASUR

The member states of UNASUR are the Argentine Republic, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Republic of Chile, the Republic of Colombia, the Republic of Ecuador, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, the Republic of Paraguay, the Republic of Peru, The Republic of Suriname, the Oriental Republic of Uruguay, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.



Its Objectives are: establish effective joint action commitments; build a common space where compliance with the mentioned above would be possible; agree on common positions on the global

agenda; intensify interaction in regional and sub-regional processes and delved into the South-South cooperation.

The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which was created in May 2008, represents the skeleton of an autonomous government structure of South America, with defense and security issues grouped under the supervision of the Council of South American Defense Council. Its main objectives are the consolidation of South America as a zone of peace, the creation of a common identity in defense matters and the strength of regional cooperation in defense matters.

According to Germán Prieto³⁴, UNASUR is not a process of regional integration but of cooperation. However, from a constructivist perspective, the institutionalization of a regional construction process contributes to build up trust between the states, which favors the consolidation of a zone of peace. A shift towards regional integration would strengthen the project, but at the current juncture this turn would jeopardize the project itself.

MERCOSUR



MERCOSUR is composed of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela, and has the largest industrial park and the largest economic center in South America. It is marked by strong asymmetries among the members. It has free trade agreements with other blocs, countries, or sub-regions.



Also its states:

- Possess the largest aquifers on Earth
- Possess large oil reserves
- Represent the largest food producers of the world
- Possess the largest energy reserves
- Contain the Amazon
- Possess large gas reserves
- Possess an important network of navigable river waters

³⁴ Prieto, Germán Camilo. La institucionalización de la Unasur y los avances en seguridad y defensa. Anuario 2012 de la seguridad regional en América Latina y el Caribe, p. 3-4

Mercosur is going through one of the most critical moments of its history. It is no longer just those problems that brought (and continue to do so) small countries into conflict with large ones (Uruguay and Paraguay versus Argentina and Brazil). Now have emerged issues that are much more serious that threaten the survival of the sub-regional integration process in Latin America. Argentina's extreme protectionism, reinforced after the entry of Venezuela, threatens Mercosur's international insertion, as reflected in Mercosur's short list of free trade agreements (FTAs): Israel, Palestine and Egypt. The negotiation with the EU is in a limbo of very difficult return and with the US there are no news of preliminary conversations of any type.

ALBA

ALBA is made up by Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Venezuela as full members, and nowadays Honduras is as a former member. Haiti, Iran, Syria, Libya and Canada are observers. Its objectives are the fight against poverty and social exclusion, based on doctrines of the left.



Venezuela's current interest seems to be focused on disputing the hegemony with the US that they hold in the Caribbean Basin. The mystery is if ALBA without Chavez could remain like a progressive alternative to US hegemony in the region, as Brazil's "benign leadership" in the continent could not. Venezuela is the primary source of resources to compensate the asymmetries, and the block itself has energy resources and minerals in large volumes, within the South American continent.

The truth is that the new relations between the US and Cuba and the electoral setbacks in Venezuela and Bolivia, linked to the crisis of prices of hydrocarbons, provoke that the leadership of Venezuela over the ALBA group is in state of crisis.

Pacific Alliance

The Pacific Alliance is composed of Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Its objectives are: delve into the the integration between these economies, define joint actions for the commercial bundling with Asia Pacific and advance progressively towards the objective of achieving the free circulation of goods, services, capital and persons. The requirements to belong to this group are: validity of the rule of law, democracy and constitutional order.



It represents as a whole, the eighth economy in the world. With a population of 215 million people, it accounts for 55% of Latin American exports and for \$ 1.7 trillion of GDP, 35% of Latin America. It has the goal of having a free trade zone similar to the one that EU has, where people and capitals move freely. Mexico and Chile are members of the OECD.

Evolution of the situation in South America

As Niño Guarnizo recalls ³⁵, "during the last year, the regional security trends of previous years have been maintained: decrease in the influence of the United States in the region and expansion of organized crime with the challenges it represents for the security and democratic governance of some countries."

During the period of time passed between the publications of both articles, there have been changes of regional importance. Some changes in Colombia and in relation to the countries of Alba have been particularly important. However, other changes have also affected the region as a whole, such as a possible recession in emerging countries, particularly China and Brazil, which would affect a region, South America, whose economy has a critical reliance on the export of raw materials.

Finally, the results produced in the last elections and referendum indicate a profound change in several of the most important countries of the region, and in a classic geopolitical framework strongly influenced by nationalisms, would suggest a geopolitical adjustment, rather than a revolution. Brazil will continue to be the essential player in South America, in competition with the US, but with an ability to influence which is reduced with the shrinkage of its economy.

³⁵ Niño Guarnizo, Catalina. Anuario 2013 de la seguridad regional en América Latina y el Caribe, Op cit.

Negotiations between the Colombian Government and the FARC

The Colombian conflict, which goes back to a peasant uprising half a century ago, has left more than 220,000 deaths and about 6 million people displaced. The Colombian government and the FARC begin 2016 at the negotiating table. However, the peace talks began on the 17th of October 17 of 2012. The negotiation process has overcome many obstacles in order to reach a situation close to a general agreement, something that few would have wagered in 2012.

The change of government in Colombia entailed a change in its foreign policy. During the administration of Álvaro Uribe there was an alignment with the United States and a restraint from the other countries of the region; however, with the arrival of Juan Manuel Santos (2010), the relations were deeply rethought ³⁶ (Niño Guarnizo, 2011, p. XX). Another important element is the Colombian government's peace process with the FARC guerrillas (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) ³⁷.

Both parties have shown great flexibility in the negotiations, sacrificing important elements but not the essentials ones in order to prevent their collapse, even though violence in the cities has increased due to the presence of gangs, and some cartels have increased their activities and others groups such as the ELN have not participated in the negotiations and could produce an escalation to discourage the population.

Any text that eventually is approved should be submitted to a binding referendum. Public opinion was in favor of agreements, but that was before the approval of the controversial agreement on "transitional justice" and the margin in favor of the agreements was very short. Having the support of particular sectors, and in particular of the Armed Forces, could be essential to the final success.

Relations Colombia-Venezuela

With the arrival of Juan Manuel Santos, the relations were deeply rethought. Another important element is the peace process of the Colombian government with the FARC guerrillas. But perhaps the fact that alter the most the regional agenda was the death of Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, who had been re-elected four months earlier for his fourth consecutive term as president of his country. The death of the Venezuelan leader raises a series of concerns about the future of Chavism and what he nicknamed the 21st century socialism. ³⁸

In dealing with the current situation, it is not surprising how the return of populist nationalisms is undermining the process of regional integration that had cost so much effort. And this happens in a region where the main cultural factors are consistent, which in principle would favor the integration like the one of the EU.

³⁶ Niño Guarnizo Obra citada p.20

³⁷ Niño Guarnizo, Ibid, p. XVI-XVII

³⁸ Ibid, p. XV-XVI

Latin America seemed to feel, for the first time in its recent history, owner of its destiny, and wanted to emancipate itself from the "greater brothers" of the north - United States and Canada. Today, since the United States has decided to change its role in the region for the first time since it put its eyes, interests and excesses on the continent in the nineteenth century, Latin America must demonstrate that it can build its future in a "sovereign" way, not in an "isolated" one.³⁹

The rise of populist nationalisms, the attribution of internal ills to the conspiratorial actions of neighboring countries, the transnational and cross-border dynamics, the anti-Americanism, and the role of the United States, since the latest initiatives related to Cuba undertaken by President Obama, as well as the lack of an effective definition of the armed forces of these countries and their political use are factors that have to be taken into account.

Many people today question the "modern nature" of the state as the only identity of this structure of political, economic, social and territorial organization, and of its institutional mechanisms based fundamentally on the liberal principles of the West (representative democracy, economic liberalism, etc.) that design the world politics through the following mechanisms:

The construction of "strategic frontiers" and "homogeneous and monoculture identities";

"Dichotomies" based on ethnocentric criteria of recognition-nullification, inclusion-exclusion, and reductionist expressions about otherness: civilization-barbarism, modern-primitive, etc "

"Hierarchies" that define the role of actors in the international system according to their structural position in the capitalist world economy, and a specific "model of development", a specific "democratic grammar" and a specific "governance system" that respond to geo-historical interests determined by Western criteria⁴⁰ (Preciado Coronado, 2010).

³⁹ Gisbert, Carlos Mesa, AMÉRICA LATINA, DENTRO DEL PÉNDULO.. 2010, FP en español

⁴⁰ Preciado Coronado, J. (2010). La construcción de una geopolítica crítica desde América Latina y el Caribe. Hacia una agenda de investigación regional. Geopolítica(s). Revista de estudios sobre espacio y poder, vol. 1, núm. 1,, 65-94.



BRASIL

We recall that Mario Travassos ⁴¹ defined two fundamental antagonisms "... the true creative forces of what happens in the political dominions of South America."

On the eastern side, immense navigable rivers extend, inland, all the Atlantic magnificences, linking in this way the interior to the great routes of maritime circulation. There is where, clearly, takes place the second antagonism.

If we start from the Bolivian plateau towards the East, on the *divortium aquarum* that emerges from the Andean buttresses and extends through the central Brazilian plateau, the waters divide between the Amazonian basin and the one of the Silver one, until fusing itself in the orographic barrier that, in turn, distributes water between these basins and those of San Francisco and Paranahyba, we will check a new opposition. To the North, we can find the Amazon; To the South, the Silver⁴² (Travassos, 1941).

Another prominent Brazilian geopolitical, General Couto e Silva, affirms the expansionist thesis when he stated that the "manifest destiny" of his country was to advance territorially towards the Pacific. As Bernardo Kucinski notes, a Brazilian journalist and political scientist, since the military coup of 1964, the Brazilian foreign policy for South America has been officially based on the geopolitical doctrine of "concentric circles" which was adopted by President Castello Branco and his chancellor Vasco Leita da Cunha, according to which South America is an area of direct influence of Brazil, the "first circle" of its influence. (Kucinski, 1978)

Carlos de Meira Mattos was the precursor of the Global Projection of Brazil⁴³ In less than 30 years, Brazil moved from the defensive to the offensive. Its problem stops to be the possible confrontation against a coalition of his Hispanic neighbors and starts to be the recognition of its status as main power of Latin American. The new "manifest destiny" urges Brazil to dominate the South Atlantic. José Osvaldo de Meira Penna in 1988 synthesizes the three principles of Brazilian foreign policy:

⁴¹ Travassos, M. (1941). *Proyección Continental del Brasil*. Buenos Aires: República Argentina.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Meira Mattos, Carlos de. *Projecao mundial do Brasil*, Grafica Leal Limitada, Sao Paulo, 1960

- Maintenance of the border line.
- Territorial supremacy in South America in the face of any attempt to reconstitute the former Hispanic viceroalties, especially in the Plata region.
- Awareness that it has an extra continental destiny to continue especially in Africa (Torres González, 2011).

Brazil Nowadays

Against the Pacific Alliance. The Brazilian government does not like the Pacific Alliance for several reasons, starting with the fact that it is not part of it. The existence of the Alliance confronts its national elites with some of its greatest future challenges and with a series of unresolved problems, such as its insertion in the globalized world and its relationship with the United States and the European Union⁴⁴.

Carlos Malamud states that in this sense we witness a paradox that hides a contradiction: Brazil aspires to be a global player, claims its membership in the BRICS and a permanent position in the United Nations Security Council. On the other hand, its regional policy results in international isolation.⁴⁵

Economists, pointed out a fall in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 3.45%, and raised their outlook of inflation up to 7.59%. There is no doubt that Brazil is sick and its problems can be transmitted much further. The Argentine industry, especially the automobile one, which has an important market in Brazil, has already begun to feel the consequences. The orderbooks are diminished due to the contraction of Brazilian demand. At the same time, layoffs increase and unemployment in Argentina continues growing.⁴⁶

Armed Forces: Key Actors

The weight of nationalism is essential in societies and in the political systems of the region. In Latin America when there is talk about sovereignty, is always territorial sovereignty, the sacred homeland. The border defense and the national territory is the defense of sovereignty and, therefore, of the nation itself. Borders, patriotic

⁴⁴ Malamud, C. (23 de 07 de 2013). Brasil y la Alianza del Pacífico. Recuperado el 07 de 03 de 2016, de CADAL: <http://www.analisislatino.com/notas.asp?id=6412>

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Malamud, C. (11 de 10 de 2015). *La crisis brasileña y sus efectos regionales*. Recuperado el 07 de 03 de 2016, de Infolatam: <http://www.infolatam.com/2015/10/12/la-crisis-brasilena-y-sus-efectos-regionales/>

territory and sovereignty are united in an iron trilogy that guarantees the existence of the republic⁴⁷. Carlos Malamud thinks that :

The defense of borders justifies practically everything, including wars if necessary. It is true that in Latin America the incidence of war conflicts has been noticeably lower than in other parts of the world, but this does not exempt the fact that for a long time the warlike assumption most frequently handled by the armies of the area was an invasion coming from a neighboring country.⁴⁸

The missions of the Armed Forces have not undergone radical changes since the post-Cold War. Although they may vary from country to country, they generally:

- A) monitor and defend the land borders, maritime and air spaces,
- B) control the emergence of subversive movements,
- C) contribute to the development of national infrastructures without competing with civilians,
- D) collaborate in natural disasters,
- (E) participate in peacekeeping missions, and
- (F) advise civil authorities and regional organizations about the technical aspects of international conflict resolution and verification of arms control agreements.⁴⁹

La defensa de la nación ante cualquier amenaza externa es su función legitimadora e irreductible. Por otra parte, la participación en misiones internacionales y en operaciones de paz no es menos importante ya que contribuyen en la profesionalización de las Fuerzas Armadas y desvían su atención de la política interna minimizando cualquier tentativa de alcanzar el poder por vías inconstitucionales

The defense of the nation against any external threat is its legitimating and irreducible function. On the other hand, participation in international missions and peace operations is no less important because they contribute to the professionalization of the Armed Forces and divert their attention from internal politics by minimizing any attempt to reach power by unconstitutional means.⁵⁰

The armed forces extend their functions to new spaces that would correspond to civilians and other state institutions, and the pressure and influence of the US is helping to shape their role and missions. In this "expansive" process emerge new

⁴⁷ Malamud, C. (28 de 06 de 2015). De fronteras, soberanías e integración latinoamericana. Recuperado el 08 de 03 de 2016, de Infolatam: <http://www.infolatam.com/2015/06/28/de-fronteras-soberanias-e-integracion-latinoamericana/>

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Bustamante, F. (1995). La seguridad hemisférica en los años 90. Nueva Socie-dad, No. 138, Caracas., 106-119.

⁵⁰ Bustamante, F. (1995). La seguridad hemisférica en los años 90. Nueva Socie-dad, No. 138, Caracas., 106-119.

risks to democracy and the demilitarization and professionalization processes of the armed forces turn out to be problematic.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the economic cycle based on high commodity prices is over and that governments have stopped receiving some of the resources that, through exports, sustained high public spending. Sailing with wind in favor is one thing, and to row against current, is something very different. And here is where problems begin.⁵¹

The model based on unlimited social spending and on patronage policies has been exhausted, which does not necessarily imply the end of populism. This does not mean the disappearance of the populist governments in Latin America, where we have known left populism, right populism and plainly populism.⁵²

An apparent certainty about the political situation of the moment is the turn to the right, a change of political cycle. But not even in the first decade of the twenty-first century there was a turn to the left, nor probably in the following years there will be a turn to the right. Malamud states that the former, the Bolivarian hegemony, is in clear regression, while the new, whose true identity is still unknown, has not yet come to the surface. While some insist on continuing to stare at the statue of Néstor Kirchner, which dominates the entrance to UNASUR headquarters, others are waiting for those who have not yet arrived.⁵³

Economic forecasts on the future of Latin America are worrying, although the future of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean is less bleak than the future of South America. Even within this latter region, the result will not be the same for those who are part of the Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia and Peru), and for those who are part of Mercosur or ALBA. The role of Brazil in MERCOSUR and UNASUR is likely to be reduced and its capacity to encourage the unfinished negotiation with the EU is likely to be diminished.⁵⁴

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⁵¹ Malamud, C. (17 de 01 de 2016). América latina 2016: ¿cambio de ciclo o agotamiento del modelo? Recuperado el 17 de 03 de 2016, de Infolatam: <http://www.infolatam.com/2016/01/17/america-latina-2016-cambio-de-ciclo-o-agotamiento-del-modelo/>

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Malamud, C. (31 de 01 de 2016). La cumbre de CELAC en Ecuador. Recuperado el 07 de 03 de 2016, de Infolatam: <http://www.infolatam.com/2016/01/31/la-cumbre-de-celac-en-ecuador/>

⁵⁴ Ibid

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