FROM THE ASHES OF IDEOLOGY: REGIONAL SYSTEM, BORDERS AND INTER-STATE CONFLICTS IN LATIN AMERICA

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I. Introduction

Those who have lived the Cold War era in Latin America will naturally identify two features of the world, neither so brave nor so new, that emerged in the prolegomena of its crisis: the debut or the return of democracy in almost all the States, and the greater autonomy that the latter came to enjoy with regards to the center of the capitalist system.[1] The social sciences soon reflected those changes, promoting certain issues to the front line of academic endeavor and relegating others to the condition of intellectual pastimes. Thus, such terms as dependency or imperialism – common language in the analysis of the continent's structural configuration until yesterday – suggest now a remote past, neighboring the realms of archeology. One should be suspicious of so much distancing in such a short time, and ask, first, whether the pace of change has affected our capacity to perceive reality to the point that we are running away from our own shadow. This means, in regards to the subject treated here – border conflicts and inter-state wars in today Latin America – to inquiry about the transformations that took place in the regional State system after the Cold War vis-à-vis the configuration of factors that have been responsible for the relative peace in the continent. In doing so, we should be able to identify potential threats that could upset such trend in the future.

The conceptual task involves a classic challenge, namely, to discriminate novelty from what has long been embedded in our backs– an effort geared not so much to separate legacy from change, but to imbricate both dimensions in order to understand the workings of the present. Among the topics examined here are: the secular course of inter-state conflicts in the region; the Organization of American States (OAS) as a pacifying agency, and the destabilizing potential of border conflicts within the current regional framework, characterized by ideological alliances and the crises of United States hegemony.

Since 1825, there have been, in Latin America, ten inter-state disputes that can be characterized as important wars: five took place during the nineteenth century and the other half in the twentieth, of which three were fought before the end of Second World War, and two after

[1] I am grateful to Mónica Cabezas, Maya Mitre and Gabriel Mitre for the translation of parts of this paper. Eventual mistakes are all mine.

it. All five armed confrontations in the nineteenth century had to do with border definition between countries: the two Cisplatine Wars, the War of the Confederation, the Triple Alliance, and the War of the Pacific. In the twentieth century, up to the end of Second World War, there were three Inter-States armed confrontations: the Chaco War, between Bolivia and Paraguay, the largest of all, the conflict that involved Peru and Colombia in Leticia (1932-1933), and the dispute between Peru and Ecuador over the territory around the navigable part of the Marañón river (1941–1942) in the Amazon region.[2] The path of post-war conflicts can be divided in two phases. The first one started with the emergence of the regional system established within the frame of the OAS, in 1948, and finished with the military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965. During this period there were no Inter-State armed struggles. In the second phase, which goes right up to the end of the Cold War, a small number of armed conflicts occurred.[3] The main ones being the Football War between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969, and the Malvinas/Falklands War between Argentine and Great Britain in 1982. There were three other serious military incidents that did not end up in armed confrontation: one, between Chile and Argentine over the Beagle channel, another between Ecuador and Peru in 1985 in the Condor Mountain Ridge and, finally, the dispute, in 1987, between Colombia and Venezuela over a maritime area which is yet to be demarcated in the Venezuela Gulf.[4] The period that goes from the end of the Cold War to the present is better characterized by the successful effort to definitively overcome old historical controversies over boundaries than by the deflagration of new inter-state clashes, being the one between Peru and Ecuador, in 1995, the only event of significant scale. In synthesis, since 1945 up to now there have been around 30 situations of bilateral conflicts of variable magnitude and intensity, but, as it was observed, very few ended up in war of big proportions. In virtue of this relative peaceful course the region is clearly different from other areas of the planet.

The exegetic charade in most studies about this topic includes the following statements: in Latin America border and territory disputes, besides being frequent, have a tendency to last for long periods of time and, in certain occasions, they result in the use of military force, but very rarely the outcome has been full-fledged war. Among the most outstanding factors that have been proposed to explain this singular phenomenon are: the relative marginality of Latin America relative to the neuralgic centers of world power, the moderating power of the US and, finally, the existence of a host of regional organizations with great experience in the arbitration

[2] The terrible massacre ordered by Trujillo against the Haitian people living at the frontier is not considered here as an inter-state conflict. About this tragedy, involving a complex set of historical, ethnic and political factors, consult: Accilien; Adams; Méléance, 2006.
[3] Grabendorff, 1982, p. 272.
[4] Pardo, 1999, p. 2.

of inter-state conflicts.[5] The question asked in this paper is whether the pacifist tradition will stand in the face of United States hegemony crises and, on the other hand, the growing insertion of Latin America in the global system, in a scenario where ideological antagonisms have flared once again involving competition for regional leadership and an eventual loss of legitimacy on the part of collective security organizations.

II. The evolution of the Inter-American system and the Pax Americana

Having the OAS's itinerary as a road map, we shall analyze the nature and evolution of the conflicts in different periods, with emphasis on the role of the United States in the hemispheric system. Studies about Inter-American relations tend to consider the OAS as an institution manipulated by Washington and, at times, as a mere extension of American interests. With a few finishing touches, such an image may be an adequate representation of the Organization's performance during the period that goes from its foundation (1948) up to the US intervention in Guatemala (1954), but it should not be generalized for its entire history; nor should its course be regarded as the panacea portrayed by its most feverous apologists. There is no need to go to extremes: an empirically based exam will show a complex and mutable reality. To begin with, the principles that came to be part of the OAS – recognition of the countries' sovereignty, non intervention in domestic matters, peaceful solution of disputes, consultation and self-determination – had shaped and structured relationships among the Latin American countries, well before the United States started to play a dominant role in the regional system.[6] On the other hand, the principle of non-intervention, explicitly targeted by the Monroe Doctrine (1823) to foreign extra-continental powers, experienced a turnabout in the Roosevelt's corollary (1905), through which the United States reserved itself the "right" to interfere in any Latin American republic that would not meet its political and financial obligations –and the number of interventions perpetrated from then up to 1947 were plenty.[7] In Latin America, on the contrary, juridical instruments were being elaborated throughout this phase to oppose the North-American thesis: the Drago (1902) and Tobar (1907) Doctrines, the first against the use of armed forces to collect public debts, the latter against the recognition of de facto governments and, later, the Estrada Doctrine (1930), that asserted the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries.

The Inter-American System that emerged after the Second World War was sustained, in the beginning, by two juridical instruments: the American Treaty on Peaceful Solutions, or the

[5] Domínguez et al, 2003, p. 358.
[6] Shaw, 2003, p. 64.
[7] Romero, 2004, p. 417.

Bogotá Agreement (1948), established during the IX International American Conference, and the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, better known as the Rio Treaty (1947). In both cases, the member countries made a commitment not to resort to threats or to the use of force, but, on the contrary, to arbitrate their disputes through the procedures set by the Inter-American System, before taking them to United Nations General Assembly or to the Security Council. The OAS's Charter also established that the countries could use any other peaceful resources that could allow them to settle their quarrels. Although the Rio Treaty does not compel the signatory States to solve their controversies according to the OAS' rules, the inclination has been to consider them an effective way to be used in such situations.[8] During these years, the biggest part of the pleas channeled to the OAS had to do with border disputes, sometimes tinted by the tensions between democratic governments and dictatorships (Costa Rica-Managua, 1948; Dominican Republic-Cuba, 1949), and all of them were peacefully overcome by consensus.

The democratic spirit present in the initial post-war moves rapidly disappeared, giving place to security concerns which, in tune with "Cold War's demands and language", frequently encouraged the proliferation of dictatorships submissive to the will of the great power, particularly in Central America.[9] At the time of drafting the Rio Treaty, it had already been foreseen that the system could not depend solely on the Assembly of Foreign Affairs Ministers in order to respond to situations which required prompt military action and that, therefore, the Council should act as a consulting organ and decide with the power conferred to it by the old Pan-American Statute.[10] A year later, when the OAS was established at the Bogotá Conference, the United States insisted on the idea of having a continental political-military unification as the best way to fight communism, while the statements of the Latin-American representatives gave emphasis to the need of elaborating a plan of economical aid to the region – a clamor reaffirmed by the Pan-American Operation –a project proposed by Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961) that would only be taken into account and partially carried out after the Cuban Revolution, through the Alliance for Progress sponsored by the administration of John F. Kennedy (1961-1963). Meanwhile, the region entered in the Cold War tunnel under the United States' political and military armor.

[8] Martz, p. 179-81.
[9] The Rio Treaty was used as a model to create NATO. The main objective was to establish an inter-American army, under the command of the United States. About this subject, consult: López-Maya, 1995, p. 136.
[10] Replaced by the OAS in 1948. About the Pan-American Union and the OAS's origins, see: Dreier, 1963, p. 299.

III. The impact of the Cuban Revolution on the hemispheric system

Starting from the Cuban Revolution (1959-1962), political conflicts in the region began to assume a marked ideological character and, directly or in a roundabout way, involved the United States and some Latin-American governments over which fell the suspicion of being under communist influence: Cuba, Dominican Republic or Guatemala at different times. Disagreements within the OAS gained intensity as the United States' interventions became more frequent and guerrilla warfare, supported by the Island's regime, proliferated throughout the region. From the first moment, US expectations to find support for a military action against Cuba were frustrated within the OAS, as was its attempt to promote a collective breaking off of diplomatic relations with the revolutionary government. This proposal was not accepted by the stronger countries of the region: Brazil, Argentine and Mexico.[11] During the military regimes of the 60s and 70s, the instruments of the Inter-American Defense System were often used by the United States to justify the use of force, support dictatorships and give legitimacy to its interventionist actions.[12] At the same time, guerrilla movements – some guided by an old libertarian spirit, others by instructions from the Cuban government, or by both forces – violated the premises of national sovereignty in several fronts; concurring in this with the attitude of the big power.

In any case, US hegemony in the regional system diminished the chances that Inter-States conflicts turn into open wars. The fact that there were two important armed confrontations during the peak of the Cold War – Honduras and El Salvador, Argentina and Great Britain – does not represent a deviation from such course.[13] The truth is that during this phase, when the Caribbean was vital to the United States' strategic interests, the disputes over inter-state borders, which intermittently agitated the region's scenario – Chile-Argentine, Chile-Bolivia, Guatemala-Great Britain, Honduras-Nicaragua, Peru-Ecuador, Venezuela-Guiana – were quickly stifled, and none of them prompted military confrontation.[14] The willingness to accept arbitration in their disputes, under the assumption that the principle of non-intervention would be upheld, contributed to the pacification of State relationships in the region. The OAS and, particularly, the Inter-American Committee of Peace (IACP), was put into action 34 times from 1948 until

[11] During With the beginning of the military regimes, most of the Latin American governments suspended diplomatic relations with Cuba. Mexico was one of the few countries that maintained continuous diplomatic relations with the Island's regime. About the initial impact of the Cuban revolution within the hemisphere, see: Quintaneiro, 1988.

[12] Sotomayor, 2004, p. 34.

[13] Dominguez and others used these two examples to show that the United States' hegemony is irrelevant to explain the prospects of war and peace in Latin America, and, in doing so, they raise the exceptions to the condition of "proofs". Dominguez et al, 2004, p. 373.

[14] Grabendorff, 1982, p. 274.

the military intervention in the Dominican Republic (1965), and played a crucial role in the solution of most of the conflicts during this phase.[15]

The emergence of military regimes all over Latin America in the sixties and seventies mark the beginning of a new phase. The failure of guerrilla actions in Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala and Brazil led the governments of the region to consider the Cuban regime no longer an imminent threat. It was exactly during this period that the OAS's statute suffered modifications in order to inhibit interventionist practices, and, for that purpose, article 9 was drafted so as to define with more precision what should be understood as "aggression". It is true that the United States, a decisive player in the system, continued to act unilaterally every time that it considered that its interests were being damaged. Nevertheless, US viewpoints about security threats in the region were several times successfully rebuffed within the Organization. The most emblematic case probably was the decision taken by the OAS with relation to Nicaragua in 1978. In that occasion, the United States' proposal to organize a government of national unity with the support of Inter-American peace forces was rejected. At the end, the resolution approved by most of the Latin American countries, fearful that the US's initiative would prolong the Somoza regime and turn into an excuse for another intervention, was "practically" a call for the people of Nicaragua to overthrow the dictatorship and establish a democratic government, through "elections". The prediction of an annalist, in the sense that the episode "may well have marked the nadir of U.S. influence in the OAS"[16] would be in part corroborated by future events.

Changes in the structure of dependency readily were translated into the OAS's normative and institutional configuration which, at that time, experienced greater democratization. An agreement was reached in 1975 so that sanctions stipulated by the Rio Treaty could be suspended by a simple majority, instead of the traditional two thirds. In spite of US opposition, a new article on collective economic security for development was also approved, and the Special Consulting Committee, created to monitor Cuban activities in the region, was finally abolished.[17] In the following years, whenever the Latin American countries took a stance contrary to that of the United States, be it with relation to Nicaragua (1978), Panama (1989) or about the conflict between Argentine and the United Kingdom (1982), the US position was simply defeated, or had to be modified to follow the will of the majority.[18]

[15] Grabendorff, 1982, p. 274.
[16] This statement was made by Thomas Walker, Apud Shaw, 2003, p. 79.
[17] Muñoz, 1984, p. 160.
[18] Shaw, 2003, p. 81.

The spectrum of the issues channeled to the OAS Council widen during this phase, and pending questions over borders made their comeback, once again tinted with economic motivations geared to take control of or have access to natural resources. Matters related to fishing rights, use of resources in frontier areas and territorial claims intertwined in a string of conflicts: Argentine-Brazil, Chile-Argentine, Chile-Bolivia, Colombia-Venezuela, Nicaragua-Colombia, Mexico-United States, Panama-United States, Peru-Chile, and Venezuela-Guiana. But only in a couple of cases there were armed confrontations: Argentine-Great Britain (1982) and Peru-Ecuador (1995). Guerrilla warfare, with its characteristic hybrid shape of civilian and Inter-State conflict, reappeared once again in several countries. The most critical situations took place in Nicaragua and Guatemala, which only managed to exit from the inferno of such two-faced wars, after "three generations of peace deals", negotiated between governments and guerrilla, with the mediation of international organizations.[19]

IV. The scenario at the dawn of the millennium: democracy and regionalism

With the end of the Cold War and the consolidation of democracy in the region, conditions to find a negotiated way out to old conflicts improved throughout the next decades. The number of direct interventions carried out by the United States also diminished[20], at a time when the OAS's institutional incentives turned more attractive and profitable for that power to choose multilateral options for conflict resolutions.

Nowadays, there are fewer disputes over border issues. Secular and highly inflammable quarrels have been totally or partially overcome during the 90s: Peru-Ecuador solved their disputes concerning the Amazon border in 1999; Chile and Argentine negotiated their differences in the same decade, except for a glacial strip of about 50 kilometers in the south of Patagonia. A treaty, mediated by the United Nations in 2007, solved the controversies about sea limits between Suriname and Guiana. Finally, Cuba, excluded from the organization in 1962, was readmitted in June of 2009, in spite of the United States that conditioned its approval to a commitment on the part of the Island's regime to observe the premises of democracy.

In any case, territorial and frontier questions continue to sour the relations of several countries. Nicaragua still has not abandoned its claim over the Fonseca Gulf and the Colombian island of San Andrés, mostly in virtue of their symbolic political value than for economic motives.[21] Also remain latent the Argentinean demand over the Malvinas, which can be described as a frontier issue, since that country considers the islands an extension of its

[19] Matul; Ramirez, 2009, p. 95.
[20] Grabendorff, 1982, p. 272. Military Occupation of Haiti from 1994 to 2004.
[21] Briscoe, 2008, p. 2.

continental platform, as well as the Bolivian claim to at least part of the territory lost in the war against Chile.

During the last thirty years, as a result of democratization and regional integration processes, other forums were institutionalized with the purpose of securing peace between countries that are part of specific blocs. Among the most important agreements in that direction are: the Framework Treaty for Democratic Security, signed by the Central American states in 1995; the Caribbean Regional Security System, established in 1996; the Mercosul Declaration by which the country members, together with Bolivia and Chile, regarded the whole area a peace zone in 1999, and the Andean Charter for Peace and Security, signed by the participant countries in 2002. These regional platforms may complement and expand OAS's actions or, at times, function as replacements, since, as we will see later, not every country adheres with equal zeal nor shows the same positive attitude with regards to the Inter-American organization.

Finally, the architecture of the Inter-American System contemplates alternative forums which, created in the past to mediate disputes, have become institutionalized in virtue of their being summoned in several occasions. This is the case of the Rio Protocol, established in 1942, as a mediator in the war between Ecuador and Peru, or the role of the OAS's General-Secretary that, by request of States, has worked for the solution of pending issues such as those between Belize-Guatemala and Honduras-Nicaragua. All this institutional background in conflict resolution, although it does not eliminate the possibility of future wars, it certainly makes more fluid, speedy and efficient the arbitration of conflicts before they can result in armed struggles of big proportions.

V. The beginning of a new hemispherical order

In regards to the topic under consideration, three developments stand out as most significant in the last decades. First, the quasi simultaneous Latin-Americanization of Brazilian and Argentine's foreign policies – two countries which, despite their cultural differences and specific weights in the region's balance of power, had historically searched for and imagined their national destinies beyond the south. In second place, the growing visibility of Venezuela in the hemispheric and extra-continental scenario, once again under the banner of Latin Americanism. And, finally, the renewed importance of the Caribbean and Central America area in the face of present day ideological polarization. Let us consider those processes and their relevance with relation to the theme under discussion.

1. Brazil and Argentine: the reasons for cooperation

It is a fact that, throughout history, Brazil, and even more so Argentina, have never been short of intellectuals who struggled for the inclusion of their countries in the matrix of Latin American identity. However, in the fields of government policy and diplomacy, both States – for different reasons – have lived during centuries with their back turned on the *Extremo Occidente*.[22] Notwithstanding this, the perception both countries developed of one another was in no way the most suitable to encourage cooperation. In fact, a survey carried out in urban areas, just before the Malvinas War, showed that only a small percentage of the Argentineans and Brazilians interviewed considered it worthwhile that their respective governments made any effort whatsoever to build up a preferential relationship with the neighboring country. Even the Soviet Union was a preferred option for the establishment of cooperative links towards development, although the number of Argentineans that believed Brazil would be a good partner was higher than the number of Brazilians with the same opinion about Argentina.[23] It was against this background of mutual distrust that the Latin-Americanization of both countries' foreign policies occurred, transforming the traditional antagonism into a partnership with increasing degrees of cooperation and coordination of actions within the regional scenario.

The catalyzing circumstances of this change were of reverse signals: in the case of Argentine, the misfortune of the Malvinas war; in Brazil, the fortunate growth and industrial modernization reached in the 70s. Crisis and decadence on one side, hopes of prosperity and rising expectations on the other, and a simultaneous movement on both parts to drift away from the United States. Changes started on the late 70s, paradoxically while military regimes were in place in both countries, where national security doctrines ruled promoting "geopolitical competition, market-oriented practices and a *realpolitik* approach" in relation to foreign affairs.[24] Up to then, the links maintained by Brazil with eight of its nine neighboring countries had been lax, with a more intense exchange with its inevitable partner, Argentine, mostly of a conflicting nature. Thus, South-South relations were established, to a great extent, on the basis of a secular absence of direct contacts, as shown by the fact that when João Batista Figueiredo (1979-85) visited Buenos Aires in 1980, 45 years had elapsed since any other Brazilian President had been there, and when he visited Lima, Bogota and Caracas, he was the first Brazilian President to set foot on those capital cities since the establishment of the Republic.[25]

[22] A term used to refer to Latin America.
[23] Selcher, 1985, p. 74.
[24] Resende-Santos, 2002, p. 91.
[25] The visit took place during the presidency of Jorge Videla. Selcher, 1985, p. 69.

The internationalization of the Brazilian economy in the 60s and 70s explains, in part, the course followed by its foreign policy, but there were other intervening factors that should be taken into consideration. One of them was the suspension, during the presidency of Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979), of the military assistance accord with the United States in response to the pressure exerted by the Carter administration in relation to human rights.[26] Coincidental with this drifting apart from the North, there was great progress in the negotiations over the Corpus-Itaipu hydroelectric dam, which begun to be built in 1974. Against all predictions, the intense controversies during previous years about the project of Alto Paraná were solved by the Tripartite Agreement signed in October, 1979. This cooperative attitude, increasingly supported by institutional mechanisms, was enhanced during the presidency of Figueiredo, when the conviction that Brazil's development "could not be planned leaving aside the Latin American context" took root.[27] During his government, the Cooperation Agreement for the Development and Pacific Use of Nuclear Energy was reached in May, 1980, this being a decisive step forward in overcoming a rivalry that went back to colonial times.

In the transition phase, the democratic platform offered more and better conditions to strengthen the relations with neighboring States and to create or restructure regional blocks. Bilateral cooperation continued during the presidency of José Sarney (1985–1990). Thus, in little more than a decade, Brazil and Argentine managed to structure "one of the most successful cooperation regimes in the world" which, besides the nuclear agreement, created the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) in 1991, an association which included Uruguay and Paraguay.[28] Mercosur continued to be a priority in the agenda of the governments of Collor de Mello (1990-1992) and Itamar Franco (1992-1995), and its consolidation, during the consecutive governments of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003), was accompanied by two ruling principles of the foreign policy implemented at that time: the firm defense of the autonomy of the State, especially in disputes with the United States, and the promotion of democracy as a non-negotiable value.[29] Within this design, described as open regionalism, the South took a privileged place in the Brazilian agenda, beyond circumstantial gains or losses. With a wording that reminds us of Ortega y Gasset, the Minister Celso Lafer clearly pointed out the way to be followed by his country: "for us, [Mercosur] is destiny, a part of our

[26] Selcher, 1985, p. 68.

[27] Selcher, 1985, p. 69.

[28] In 1996, Chile and Bolivia became associate members, that is, they participate in the free commerce zone, but do not obliged to adopt the foreign tariff system. Resende-Santos, 2002, p. 89.

[29] See in this respect, the position adopted by the Brazilian government during the political crises in Paraguay (1996, 1996, 2001) and Venezuela (2002), as well as the inclusion of the Democratic Clause in Mercosur. Also see: Cardoso, 2004.

circumstances. ALCA is not destiny, but an option".[30] As time passed, and until the creation of the South-American Nations Community (2007) and the South-American Union (2008), the scope of these "circumstances" became increasingly larger. Since then, the emphasis given by the Brazilian foreign policy to southern identity represents a change in relation to the universalism of its previous attitude. On the other hand, it makes difficult to perceive the structural diversity of the region – a fact that may increase the risk of ideological distortions affecting the country's standing in the event of conflicts.[31]

As to Argentine, there were two facts that converged, making this country choose to cooperate with its neighbors. The first one was the Malvinas War. Although the controversy with Great Britain goes back to 1833, during more than a century it did not affect the strong economical relation between the two States. It was precisely the decline of England as a world power, after the Second World War, what encouraged Argentine's demand and the British government's willingness to reach an agreement. To this end, there were several negotiation attempts between 1960 and 1980, and when everything pointed to a pacific and definitive solution of the secular dispute, the war broke out. A premonitory article, written a couple of months before the event, pointed out with great precision the motives that could halt the pacification process:

> The basic obstacle in the way of agreement is, however, that both governments while anxious to settle, are imprisoned by history – that is, by past pronouncements and obligations; the latter, by restricting their freedom for maneuver, thwart a negotiated compromise. Thus, the British government – as illustrated in 1980 by the hostile reception given to Ridley's initiative by both the islanders and parliament – is restrained by a commitment to respect the principle of national self-determination as well as by the unchanging view of the islanders. In turn, the manipulation of the dispute for both domestic and international purposes prevents Argentine acceptance of anything short of sovereignty.[32]

And it was precisely the manipulation of the Malvinas' issue for domestic purposes, both by the Argentinean military regime and by the British Parliament, what turned out to be the responsible factor for the transformation of the peace negotiations into a sudden war.[33] In 1982, the Argentinean military government, ill at its roots, made a last attempt to overcome the crisis it

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[30] Vigevani; Oliveira; Cintra, 2003. In any case, the regional integration plans existed well before Mercosur. Just remember, among other structures, the Latin American Free Commerce Association (ALALC), created in 1960, succeeded by the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), created in 1980, as well as other instruments, for example, the Plata Bay Treaty.

[31] About the construction of the idea of South America through discourse and practice, by Brazilian diplomacy, see: Galvão, 2009, p. 63-80.

[32] Beck, 1982, p. 54.

[33] In this occasion, the British Parliament, going against the Executive initiatives, defended the exercise of the principle of self-determination by the islanders.

was going through, and launched the country into the irresponsible adventure of the Malvinas. During the conflict, the unconditional support of the United States to England, notwithstanding the anticommunist alliance established shortly before by the Reagan administration with the government of Leopoldo Galtieri (1981-1982), clearly showed the real limits between the Inter-American defense system and the old Monroe Doctrine.[34] In compensation, the war intensified Argentine's desire to cooperate, first with Brazil, in spite of the apathetic position adopted by this country during the conflict, and afterwards with Chile, going back to the negotiation table over the Beagle Canal, in spite of the surreptitious help offered by the government of Pinochet to Great Britain.[35] After defeat, Argentine, that used to think of itself as essentially European and quite different from its neighbors, started to cultivate a Latin American identity, with all the ideological features implied by such term. At the same time, the media offered an ample space to disclose the culture and concerns of the region, while the political class recovered the old discourse which tied the destiny of the country to the vicissitudes of the South.

In the wake of the Malvinas War, the nuclear question, one of the most sensitive, since it involved controlling a technology that could end up developing nuclear weapons, was also favorably negotiated between both Atlantic countries. The history of this issue, full of mutual preventions, was not at all auspicious. In November, 1983, Argentine, more advanced in this field than Brazil, announced that it had been able to develop, through a secret program, the necessary technology to produce enriched uranium, creating an atmosphere of suspicion in the neighboring country. Fortunately, the expectations of a "nuclear race", that would ruin the commitment assumed three years before, did not materialize. On the contrary, in the 90s, Argentine and Brazil established collective security institutions capable of promoting cooperation with pacific purposes in this area. On November 28, 1990, Presidents Carlos Saúl Menem and Fernando Collor de Mello signed, in Iguaçu, an agreement by which both countries abandoned the development of nuclear weapons, and subjected themselves to mutual supervision institutions, and inspections by the Atomic Energy Agency. Such statement was endorsed one year later by the Guadalajara Agreement, in Mexico, which laid the foundations for the creation of the Brazilian-Argentinean Agency of Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (BAAAC). At present, Argentine and Brazil are signatories to the Tlatelolco Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty.[36] In this case, cooperation was facilitated by the efforts of the democratic regimes to submit the Armed Forces to the control of the civilian power. At that stage of the democratization process, both the Argentinean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the

[34] About this crisis, see: Feldman, 1985.
[35] Selcher, 1985, p. 30
[36] Sotomayor, 2004, p. 49.

Itamaraty showed greater autonomy with regard to the pressures from the military area.[37] A sign of the climate of distension that came to prevail in both countries has been the significant reduction of Brazilian troops in the Southern frontier and the change in the focus of attention towards the Northeast and North of the country, particularly to the Amazonian region, where Brazilian frontiers stretch along more than 11,000 kilometers.[38]

It is clear that neither the gap with respect to the United States, nor the approximation between the countries of the region should be attributed exclusively to conjectural factors, such as the support given by the United States to Great Britain during the Malvinas War. As a matter of fact, the relative consensus that prevailed among American countries during the Cold War phase begun to diminish due to factors such as the strong industrial development of some economies, the emergence of sub-regional blocks, changes in geopolitical strategies, and the emergence of a new consciousness among the military segments over the technological dependency with relation to the United States.[39] The result was the diversification of markets on the part of the most dynamic economies, the local production of weapons and the end of US monopoly as a supplier. All these factors set the basis, still in the authoritarian period, for the development of more autonomous policies.[40]

Starting in the 90s, the end of the Cold War, as well as later redefinitions of US priorities, specially after the September 11 attack, took that power further away from the regional context. On the other hand, the journey to the North, begun by Mexico since the time it joined the NAFTA, enlarged the gap for the introduction of new political actors in Central America and Caribbean. The Chavez regime took advantage of the empty space to strengthen its presence in the area, using, as others have done before, the enormous power of the Venezuela's oil. And at the same time that the rise of *Chavismo* strengthen the ties of Venezuela with the countries of the Caribbean Basin and boosted the Cuban regime, the presence of the old left in several Latin-American governments – among which the largest and most modern economies, such as Brazil, Chile and Argentine– contributed to magnify the role of Venezuela as a global player.

2. Venezuela and Colombia: the reasons for conflict

The conflict between Venezuela and Colombia, which has been going on for sometime, does not fit the traditional pattern of border controversies so recurrent in the Latin American

[37] Sotomayor, 2004, p. 49.
[38] Pion-Berlin, 2000, p. 52.
[39] Selcher, 1986, p. 86.
[40] Muñoz, 1984, p. 159-60.

scenario and, by now, it has turned into an important parameter of the new hemispheric landscape. To understand its potential to polarize the region – the United States and its preferential partner (Colombia), versus Venezuela and its closest allies (Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua)– one must transcend the temporal mark of its most recent protagonists: Bush, Uribe and Chávez. Currently, the struggle involves the alignment of governments in two basic camps according to political affinities and a different stance with respect to the US guidelines on free commerce, war on drugs, military bases and collective security. It is, precisely, because of the complex network of national interests put into motion in each round of the dispute between Venezuela and Colombia that the degree of uncertainty as to its possible consequences runs among the highest in the region.

The recent episode, caused by the transgression of the Ecuadorian frontier on the part of the Colombian armed forces in the fight against the FARC, illustrates well how controversies of this kind can easily become internationalized, as well as the difficulties facing the OAS to arbitrate them. The episode also reveals the deep insertion that civilian conflicts of some countries have in regional and extra-regional geopolitical dynamics. The crisis, on that occasion, was catalyzed by a Colombian air strike over the Ecuadorian territory, with the objective of targeting one of the FARC's main leaderships, Raul Reyes. In sequence, the transfer of Ecuadorian and Venezuela troops to the Colombian frontier transformed this episode rapidly in a confrontation between the Chávez regime and the United States government.

The accusations of the Colombian authorities that Chávez was financing the guerrilla, was swiftly responded with the closing of the Venezuelan embassy in Bogotá and the expulsion of the Colombian representatives in Quito and Caracas. All these reactions brought both countries closer to an armed confrontation. According to Chávez's statement, the order given to the Defense Minister to send ten battalions to the frontier with Colombia and to mobilize the Air Force did not have the intention of stimulating war with the neighbor country, but fundamentally to avoid that the United States, that already had Colombia under its control, could continue to split the Latin American countries. This stereotype of a nation submitted to the will of the empire, used abundantly in the past to refer to the condition of Central American republics, and now foisted upon Colombia by some interpreters of the conflict, feeds itself, with a predatory eagerness, from long and troubled history.

As a matter of fact, the alliance between the United States and Colombia, of considerable polarizing potential in current Inter-American politics, precedes the administrations of Chávez and Uribe, and also Plan Colombia. The alliance goes back to the time when the Cuban revolution provoked considerable fear among Colombian elites. In particular the military

worried about the possibility that a Soviet expansion in the Caribe, together with territorial claims sustained by Nicaragua, as well as the presence of guerrilla groups backed by Havana, could put at risk the unity of the Colombian State. The strategy developed then by the Colombian government in order to deal with that situation crystallized in a combination of contradictory initiatives during the presidency of Julio César Turbay (1976-1982). They involved, on one hand, waging a war against internal and external forces allied with the guerrilla and, on the other, submitting to US guidelines.[41] More than the alignment of Turbay administration with Reagan's policies, what came as a surprise at that time, was the substitution of traditional Colombian foreign policy with relation to the Caribbean and hemispheric matters for a course of action that led the country in the direction of an increasingly prominent role, based on a deeper structural dependency from the United States, be it in economic, technological and military terms, exactly when other countries of the region were trying to free themselves from such a condition.[42] In spite of some later attempts to correct that course, by assuming more nationalistic and pro Latin-American stances – Contadora Group, Consensus of Cartagena –, the master line of Colombian foreign policy continued to be the one established at the peak of the Cold War, and re-affirmed now by Uribe and the Pan Colombia.

While this happened, the path of Venezuelan diplomacy seem to have gone in the opposite direction: it abandoned its traditional alliance with the US and headed towards an open confrontation with the super power. At the same time, it passed from a relative isolationism to an intense regional involvement nurtured by what has been called "oil-diplomacy" or "diplomacy of social power". From the beginning of Chávez regime up to the present, billions of dollars have been spent in generous aid programs, subsidized oil to Cuba and to members of "Petrocaribe", donatives and disaster relief-aid to Bolivia, medical equipments to Nicaragua, and free heating fuel to a considerable number of American consumers. [43]

It is quite common to attribute Venezuela's strong and increasing influence in Central America and the Caribbean to recent policies developed by the Chávez regime, using oil as a strategic basis. Nevertheless, a retrospective view of Venezuelan foreign policy shows that the intensification of its presence in the region, capitalizing the power of oil for that end, has been a deliberate goal sought by past administration, at least since the 1960s. In that sense, representative features of current Venezuelan foreign policy such as the promotion of Bolivarian ideal of Latin American unity, generous loans to governments and regional agencies, programs to subsidize or compensate increases in oil prices, active involvement in internal affairs of

[41] About Colombian diplomacy in the 70s and 80s, consult: Tokatlian, 2000, p. 336-7.
[42] Bagley; Tokatlian, 1985, p. 27.
[43] Corrales, 2008, p. 4.

Caribbean and Central American countries were also outstanding aspects of the policies implemented by Rafael Caldera (1969-1973), Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1978) and Luis Herrera Campins (1979-1983).[44]

Concomitant to the unfolding of Venezuelan strategy, United States foreign policy toward Latin America took an erratic course in the post-Cold War. In the hands of petty diplomats for the most part, it often lost, not so much the subtleness it seldom possessed, but the disposition to follow regional developments systematically with a reasonable knowledge of the continent's structural diversity. Policy in Washington has fluctuated between inaction and veiled interventionism of times past, as can be surmised by its support for the failed coup in Venezuela, its destabilizing tactics against the governments of Bolivia and Ecuador, its increase of military bases, and, more recently, by its disguised attitude that ended up legitimizing the coup in Honduras in an attempt to maintain some degree of control over its former "back yard." In synthesis, the conflict between Venezuela and Colombia, beyond the aspects mentioned above, reveals the extent to which government allied or aligned with one side or the other interpret the drama of the Colombian State and society from an ideological standpoint still anchored in Cold War principles. Under the impact of this polarization, the mediating capability of regional players is compromised, as was proven by the quarrel that occurred between the OAS Secretary-General and representatives of the United States government in regards to the conflict ignited by Colombia by its transgression upon the Ecuadorian border as well as to the Honduran crisis.[45]

3. Central America and the Caribbean in the new hemispheric arrangement

Central America and the Caribbean has been a port of entry and a stage for experimentation and the branching out of political, cultural, and ideological institutions since the Colonial era. A transmission line of ideas and goods, its impact in Latin American history has always been greater than its economic importance, quite which has oscillated in the long term. From the start, the area made its place on the American scene as one where powers measure their strength or face off in memorable arm wrestling duels: it happened long ago between Spain, England and Holland, and more recently between the United States and the Soviet Union. There, the clash of ideologies reverberates more intensely, and tends to beckon the South, even after the Cold War.

Perhaps more than in other regions, the consolidation of the Central American States and those of the Latin American Caribbean is a relatively recent phenomenon. The same condition

[44] For a good analysis of Venezuelan foreign policy in regards to the Caribbean and Central America from 1960 to 1980, see: Bond, 1982, p. 100-113.
[45] About the interrogatory of OAS Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza, see: U. S. Government, 2008.

that was used to explain their backwardness, – namely, their being located within the gravitational force of United States strategic interests – has been posited as the cause of their subsequent strengthening. In effect, according to this kind of interpretation, a major factor responsible for the modernization and expansion of the Central American States to a level closer to that of the South American countries, was the U.S. Department of State itself, which, in tune with the goals of military defense, contributed to the implementation of a series of bureaucratic and administrative reforms throughout the Cold War.[46] Even so, in most countries greater State power did not mean social and political incorporation of vast sectors of the population, nor effective control of the national territory. And it is precisely amidst the institutional void still prevalent in border areas where threats with the potential to transform internal conflicts into interstate clashes proliferate, due, in part, to a historical-spatial condition that is unlike any other in the continent. In fact, the degree of physical proximity and the intersection of the paths of those societies that at some point pretended to be a single State contribute to the dissemination of domestic tensions across national borders. Thus, more than in any other area, in Central America and the countries with umbilical connections to the Caribbean milieu, Venezuela and Colombia included, estimates about the chances of interstate armed conflict occur must shift the focus of analysis from external warfare to interstate rivalries.[47] From this standpoint, it is fitting to recall that many of the domestic conflicts that have resulted in international wars in the course of the past fifty years had the Caribbean and Central America as their main staging ground. Today, with the ideological polarization, reincarnated precisely in this region, the phenomenon may sprout again and spread, feeding on the intensification of social conflict particularly in border areas.

VI. Frontiers, organized crime and interstate conflicts

The greater porosity of frontiers, the technological advancements and economic nexuses nurtured by globalization, the practice of multilateralism in regional diplomacy, the communion of ideals and the will to achieve collective goals – ratified by the series of American Summits in the last fifteen years –, as well as the negotiated solution of old interstate rivalries allow to forecast a future of peace and democracy for the region.48 Yet the dynamics of the processes mentioned is not univocal and, depending on the scenarios, it may refuel past contentions and stimulate confrontations, since the territorial bond, despite the imaginary of globalization,

[46] Holden, 1999, p. 1-2.
[47] Thies, 2005, p. 451.
[48] Resende-Santos, 2002, p. 89.

"continues to be an important source of national identity and legitimacy".[49] In this line of thought, it is worth mentioning that although the number of areas without delimitation is significantly less today than in any other periods, still a dozen of territorial and boundary disputes are still pending. In the past eight years, force has been used in five of those cases, and troops were mobilized in two of them, involving 10 out of the 19 independent countries of Latin America.[50] Moreover, in those instances in which a country lays claim to territories lost in past wars, the threat is greater when the conflict did not end in politically negotiated settlement.[51]

Territorial disputes in frontier areas have usually a high potential for risk, due not only to their deep historical roots, but also to the fact that they involve issues of national sovereignty. And it is precisely in those locations where the contrast between interstate pacifism and the intensification of civil and criminal conflicts out of State control becomes more explicit. From Ciudad del Este, in the South, to the municipality of Tecate, in the North, the frontier possesses the same characteristics of violence, human displacement, criminality, and corruption of State institutions or sheer absence of them. The drama unfolds with particular intensity in several spots of the Mexican borders due to the strong flux of immigrants from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Colombia who seek to enter the United States by crossing, first, the Suchiate River, as a means to reach Tapachula, the main route of illegal migration to the targeted country.[52] In this map of despair, the most propitious place for the sparking of conflicts is the province of Petén, in Guatemala, particularly at the border with Chiapas, a territory over which drug trafficking cartels and transnational gangs seek to maintain control. In the same way, a sort of wild-west atmosphere prevails in the extensive Colombian borders with Ecuador and Venezuela, demarcated by high crime rates, occupation of territories by armed gangs and drug trafficking networks. There, the interests of contracting companies, irregular groups, and police forces cross each other continuously, and, what is worst, all of them are armed and "prepared to launch a military response to any incident that may occur".[53] A particularly critical case refers to the poorly surveilled frontiers between Venezuela and Colombia, where criminality has raised the level of animosity among the population to the point of fading other problems caused by the guerilla and the massive migration of Colombians to the neighboring country:

[49] Johnson, 2001, p. 132.
[50] Domínguez et al, 2004, p. 357.
[51] Hensel, 1994, p. 281. As it happened, for example, in the case of the War of the Pacific, intermittently revived in the series of disputes that still create tensions between the countries involved. The motives responsible for the continuous reactivation of the conflict throughout the years have been of varied nature: a quarrel over the course of a river (such as Lauca), the supply of gas to Chile, or any other. This is so because for Bolivia no controversy with relation to Chile is merely a circumstantial issue, but it necessarily involves a question of sovereignty, since it implies its secular claim of a sea-outlet. About the disputes relative to the Lauca River, consult: Tomasek, 1967.
[52] Briscoe, 2008, p. 3.
[53] Informe sobre fronteras, 2008, p. 4.

> Neither the maritime frontier of inconclusive definition, nor the illegal Colombian immigrants, nor the use on the part of the Colombian guerilla of official Venezuelan armament, nor the terrorist actions of the Colombian guerilla within Venezuelan territory have infuriated the common Venezuelan as much as the increase in the number of cars stolen to be sold in Colombia.[54]

Against such a background, crises like the one which lately took place between Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela, due to the bombardment of a FARC stronghold near the Putumayo River, entails a risk comparable to the lighting of a match in a flammable atmosphere. These kinds of situation promote the "militarization" of diplomacy, be it through political discourse or by transporting troops to the frontier, and jeopardizes the efforts to reach a compromise.[55] And things can get worst when, amidst the ideological cleavages already existing between the governments of the region, countries of the stature of Brazil or Argentina compromise their moderating capacities by taking sides on the basis of anachronistic interpretations of the hemisphere's context.

VII. Phoenix amidst the ashes of ideology

The new configuration of ideological cleavages, historically more dangerous and destabilizing than territorial disputes, not only could reduce the margin of efficacy of regional organizations called to arbitrate them, but also increase the explosiveness of frontier areas where there already exist controversies over the control of strategic resources or tensions resulting from the intensification of criminality and guerilla warfare – specially considering that, in the last decades, technological modernization and the diversification of weapons' supply have increased the destructive potential of military and paramilitary armies in the region. Therefore, while State frontiers might be dissolving in the waters of economic unification this is not necessarily the case in regards to adjoining societies since, as Guedes da Costa rightly argues, "national defense, for the majority of the Latin American countries, still means beware of your neighbor"[56] In this sense, it is important to remember that, notwithstanding the successful solution of several boundary disputes at the close of the XX Century, many others continue alive and have been aggravated since then. As a matter of fact, Guiana, Venezuela, Colombia and some countries in Central American have been involved in at least one militarized conflict with other States in the last decade. Within this group, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Honduras were the ones that entered into confrontation with a greater number of neighbors.[57]

[54] Pardo, 1999, p. 7.
[55] On this topic, see: Mares, Apud Pardo, 1999.
[56] Pion-Berlin, 2000, p. 61.
[57] Domínguez et al, 2004, p. 359.

Notwithstanding the fact that the formation of regional blocks has been promoting cooperation in matters of security, the armed forces, specially in countries with a high degree of military autonomy, such as Chile, have not been very enthusiastic about projects of hemispheric range. The largest economic integration has not resulted until today in a system of collective defense that could replace the one created by the Treaty of Rio. Attempts in this direction have failed due to a lack of consensus among the countries, which, in general, prefer to guarantee their own security individually or form defensive alliances grounded on ideological affinities.[58] In effect, the issue of security has been politicized as any other, stimulating the formation of different perceptions on the scale and degree of danger that certain phenomena represent in comparison to others. Thus, for instance, the war on terrorism, which is the articulating axis of a "solid political alliance" between the United States and Colombia, is seen with much less interest by the other republics. Likewise, while the official discourse of the governments of Venezuela and Brazil highlights poverty as the major threat to regional security, that of the United States bestows lesser importance to the issue. The perception of the risk that drug trafficking represents is high in the cases of Brazil, Colombia and the United States, and moderate in the remaining countries, "with the exception of Bolivia, where it is low".[59] While the possibility of US intervention is considered from medium to high by the Andean countries and Brazil, in Colombia it is considered low, that is to say, "the reversal of the imagines manipulated [by those countries] in regards to terrorism".[60]

Although the so-called "democratic thesis", of Kantian roots, considers that the more this form of government is consolidated and generalized throughout the region, the smaller the chances of conflict emerge among those States, empirical analyses about the existence of such link have shown that "democracies in Latin America are unaffected in their decision to utilize force in their foreign policy by whether or not the country with which they have a dispute is democratic".[61] This is more so in societies where the transition to democracy is still an unfinished process, since, as suggested in the analogy proposed by Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder: "governing a society that is democratizing is like driving a car while throwing away the steering wheel, stepping on the gas, and fighting over which passenger will be in the driver's seat. The result, often, is war".[62] Ask the countries that have suffered the misfortune of so much uncertainty. After all, the number of armed confrontations among Latin American and Caribbean countries under democratic rule has been nearly a dozen in the last years: Guatemala

[58] Pion-Berlin, 2000, p. 59.
[59] Bonilla; Cepik, 2004, p. 72-4.
[60] Bonilla; Cepik, 2004, p. 74.
[61] Mares; Bernstein, Apud Johnson, 2001, p. 129.
[62] Apud Johnson, 2001, p. 133.

and Belize, Guiana and Suriname, Venezuela and Guiana, Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela and Colombia, Colombia and Nicaragua, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Nicaragua and El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras, Honduras and El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.[63]

Following the same line of thought, it is worth mentioning that the correlation between democracy and civil war, within the domestic sphere, is also statistically insignificant.[64] The very conservation of this form of government by the Inter-American System does not seem to be regarded as an absolute and, hence, nonnegotiable value, as stipulated in numerous documents of the regional organizations. Notwithstanding OAS' role in the defense of democratic stability and the reestablishment of the Guatemalan and Paraguayan constitutional processes in 1993 and 1996, respectively, the recent episode in Honduras indicates not only the limits of its performance, but also the inoperative character of the Betancourt Doctrine, when the question is to break relations collectively with a government that has violated the Constitutional pact. In this case, regardless of the juridical controversy about who in fact broke the pact, the political decision of some countries not to adhere to the line determined by the Organization showed not only the fragility of the collective systems to neutralize unilateral actions, but also the considerable weight that an (almost) unilateral action still carries, when it is taken by the United States. Conversely, the episode revealed the lack of coherence of countries that work zealously for the maintenance of democracy within the hemisphere while, at the same time, keep monastic silence when it comes to be critical of leftist authoritarianism.

In Latin America, probably because of the place that the *letrados* have always occupied within the power structure, ideological disputes have always been the tempests of politics, with sufficient force to transcend national frontiers. If formerly they could be more easily appeased by the dominant presence of the United States in the region, today this country's relative withdrawal has already encouraged rivalries among the states that seek to occupy the vacuum hoping to gain greater regional and international influence. Moreover the fact that the Unites States has been explicitly left aside, together with Canada, from one of the largest organization parallel to the OAS, namely, the Summit for the Unity of Latin America and the Caribbean, in February 2001, does not necessarily contribute to the hemispheric peace.[65] Nor does it help the monarchical approach of US foreign policy, guided by everything but justice.

Regional conflicts have resumed precisely through the path of ideology which many thought the Cold War had brought to an end. For this reason, alongside the resurgence of a left still hunted by the idea of conspiracy, the United States today likewise sees, through the eyes of

[63] Domínguez, 2004, p. 380.
[64] Elbadawi; Sambanis, 2002, p. 325.
[65] Cancún Summit.

its specialized agencies, the hands of the Chávez regime in every regional event regarded as harmful for its political and economic interests.[66] Distortions also flourish political alliances of governments that are critical of the United States' foreign policy, when trying to uphold, simultaneously, social agendas of the new left and capitalist interests. Recent tensions – between Argentina and Uruguay in the case of the paper industry; Brazil and Ecuador involving the Odebrecht firm; Brazil and Bolivia because of the supply of gas; Venezuela and Brazil in consequence of Mercosur – illustrate well the difficulties of conjugating, in foreign policy, pragmatism and solidarity based on shared socialist ideals, be it those from the 21st or from the past Century.[67] Against this landscape of growing distancing from the North and splits in the South, not only OAS, initially built upon the idea of a community of interests, but also other regional organs, tend to lose their efficacy and legitimacy when arbitrating conflicts. Therefore, today, perhaps more than ever before, it is crucial to discern the frontiers that separate reality from pure ideology, so as to "protect us from our own selves, for sometimes we are our worst enemy".[68]

[66] Ellis, 2005, p. 5.
[67] Galvão, 2009, p. 67.
[68] Pardo, 1999, p. 24.

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