

FROM CONTAINMENT POLICY TO REEMERGENCE: RUSSIA IS BACK TO THE CHESSBOARD

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Introduction

The US government became used to face the world, especially after the Cold War end, as a chessboard. But a chessboard in which it was the only chess player to play – the others were just pieces. This practice reflected the disintegration of the USSR and the North-American perception that the world had turned unipolar. During the 1990s, China prioritized modernization and the overcoming of the vulnerabilities resulting from the socialist camp's collapse; Brazil, with great economic hardships (unemployment, foreign debt with the IMF, stagnation), had a foreign policy with a high degree of alignment towards the decision-making centers of the international system; India initiated reforms and sought to overcome the constraints related to the stressed tensions with Pakistan and due to the effects of going nuclear; and Russia faced a unique disorganization during a peace scenario. Naturally, such scenario reduced the scope of peripheral countries which seek an autonomous and/or non-aligned international insertion.

However, the international framework quickly changed at the turning of the 21st century. China has become the largest exporter and the second largest GDP at the end of the decade, while becoming more assertive

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internationally; the Brazil from Lula emphasized South-South relations and closer relations with emerging countries; India, despite a rapprochement with the US to legitimize its nuclearization, expanded its scope of global actions; and the Russia from Putin made the country reemerge as a great power with the capacity to assert its interests in key international issues, such as Syria, Iran and its regional near abroad. This allowed peripheral countries to have opportunities to build new alignments, seek funding and commercial alternatives in other regions and, with effect, resist political pressures from the West/U.S.. There is no doubt that the scenario has become more complex and that there are more chess players participating on the board.

In front of that, this paper analyzes Russia's challenges in its resurgence as a world power after Putin's rise to the government. The central argument is that Russia's reemergence highlighted the historical US tendency of containing it, avoiding its control over the vast Eurasian territories, a running concept among U.S. foreign policy makers, such as Brzezinski (1997). Well, what it is intended is to present, as an overall view, Western policies for Russia's containment and its answers to avoid isolation. For such, the paper is organized as it follows: the first part discusses Russia's containment history, seeking to highlight the continuity elements of this process; the second discusses how such policies aim to isolate Russia, seeking to avoid its resurgence; and, finally, the last part deals with the Russian responses and the eventual reverse effects of US attempts to preserve unipolarity.

A History of Russia's Containment

The historical framework of Russia's relations with the West is full of contradictions since the Bolshevik Revolution, especially. As Isaac Deutscher highlights, Western hostility occurred in various ways, such as with the predatory Peace of Brest-Litovsk, at the end of World War I; with the support of the White Army to overthrow the nascent revolution and its Soviets; with the blockade, boycott, and "cordon sanitaire" that followed; and the smart delays through which the West slowed the opening of a second front in World War II, leading to a holocaust and destruction of Russia (*apud* Visentini 2004, 17). It is, somehow, the containment policy's embryo that the United States would implement after the Second World War.

The US, therefore, formulated the Doctrine of Containment as a foreign policy vector in the Post-War, especially during Harry Truman's administration (1945-1953). The inspirational source was, at large, a young diplomat from the embassy in Moscow, George Frost Kennan, when he writes his account of the Soviet claims, known as the Long Telegram. In this, he interpreted the international insertion of the USSR as the combination between communist ideological zeal and Czarist expansionism. From this assumption, followed the discussions that were shaping and changing the emphasis and priorities of U.S. foreign policy. Despite the controversy, the common ground was the Soviet containment policy, whose influences range from the famous Kennan's article, in 1947, in *Foreign Affairs*, using anonymity, to the famous document of the National Security Council (NSC-68), among others (Kissinger 1997, 528-559). Not surprisingly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) creation, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were conceived to keep Western Europe as a privileged ally in containing the nascent Soviet bloc.

As maintained by Mello (1999, 131-132), these policies were based on the geopolitical and strategic formulations of Spykman's texts, according to which whoever controlled the Rimland would control Eurasia (Mackinderian Heartland) and, thus, the world. This explains the US strategy of creating military pacts in the Soviet surroundings, such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), SEATO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization), as well as bilateral military alliances with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Philippines, for example. The siege and the containment of the USSR continued to receive theories in such direction, as with Brzezinski's case. According to him, the policy should consist of creating three basic containment strategic fronts towards the Geostrategic Center (the Soviet Bloc): Far West, Populous South and Far East (Brzezinski 1986, 51).

In this sense, the containment and the cordon sanitaire represented not only the policies that guided US actions before and during the Cold War. Such policies were maintained with the USSR's disintegration and the emergence of the New Russia. The "singular Soviet collapse" (Halliday 1999) and the consequent vulnerabilities that the new Eurasian country had to experience, combined with its choice of a passive international insertion aligned with the

West, eventually obscured the containment policy. It was enough to a leadership arise willing to replace Russia in the center of international politics, challenging initiatives and imposing resistance to US and their allies' plans for the policy of containment to gain evidence.

The most symptomatic tensioning has been occurring due to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) expansion towards the countries that were part of the former socialist bloc. After the disintegration of the USSR, instead of disappearing, NATO strengthened, expanding its political agenda of action, with a security discourse that covers not only military issues, but also political, economic and social ones, and also its geographical scope, with the expansion to the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CCEE). The Organization has more than doubled the number of its members: in 1999, joined in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic; in 2004, were included Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; and in 2009, adhered Albania and Croatia. To such political and geographical expansion, this context marked the first intervention outside the member countries' domain (Balkans), without these being threatened and, to complete, exceeding the UN mandate – which should be to serve only as additional airpower.

In front of the vulnerabilities, the new Putin government, elected one year after the Russian affirmation against the Chechen separatist insurgency of 1999, seized the September 11 attacks situation to extract diplomatic dividends. On the external front, there was the replacement of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (JPC) by the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in May 2002², giving Russia greater representation. In the domestic sphere, it allowed to legitimize interventions in Chechnya and, consequently, the fight against terrorism in the Caucasus. It was a temporary move, as it became increasingly clear that the US used the fight against terrorism to legitimize the overthrown of secular (Iraq, Syria) and non-aligned (Iran) regimes, as well as to expand its defense system and, in practice, contain challenging powers (Russia, China).

² Composed by the countries of the organization and Russia, the council is seen as a mechanism for consultation, consensus building, decision-making and formulation of joint actions. In order to ensure equality between the parties, the NRC decisions are consensual. To illustrate its importance, the position of NRC's chairman is exercised by NATO's Secretary General. For more details, see the official NATO website: <http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/about/>

The fact is that, gradually, NATO became an organization with a global scope and at the margin of the United Nations system, expanding West's capacity, especially US, to protect its interests through the usage of force. Therefore, as highlighted by Rachwald (2011), the Russian government has developed a dual policy for NATO, mixing a rhetorical rejection of the organization's expansion and, at the same time, bargaining and cooperating in areas of specific interests. This duality also reflected, it is important to highlight, the own (drastic) changes of path from the USSR/Russia since the 1980s. Certainly, the Russian government has not harbored great expectations in relation to the intentions of NATO leaders. And the conflict in Ukraine was a crystalline example: the Secretary-General of the organization, Anders Fogh Rasmussen³, decided, in August 7, 2014, to suspend cooperation with Moscow in favor of a country (Ukraine) whose government is the result of a *coup d'état* clearly supported by fascist political forces. As Waltz had already called attention for, although NATO was an instrument for the maintenance of US domination over the foreign and military policies of European states, inevitably it would stimulate the strengthening of Russia's military capabilities and its approach to China (Waltz 2000, 22).

Parallel to NATO's expansion, there has been a notable expansion of the European Union (EU) since the Maastricht Treaty signing, in 1992, when it had 12 members. In 1995 it included more 3 more members (Finland, Sweden and Austria) and in 2004 it was given the decisive expansion into countries of the former European socialist bloc: except Malta and Cyprus, entered three Soviet countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and five Eastern European ones (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia). In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria adhered to and, in 2013, Croatia, while others are in conduct process, especially former Yugoslavia countries (Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia), plus Albania, Iceland and Turkey. Finally, Poroshenko's Ukraine signed an association agreement with the European Union providing trade liberalization and further integration with the bloc. In an explicit statement, the EU

³ See the news in the German DW Agency website: <http://www.dw.de/crisis/C3%A7%C3%A3o-de-uni/C3%A3o-econ/C3%B4mica-eurasi/C3%A1tica-aumenta-tens/C3%A3o-entre-ue-e-r/C3%BAasia/a-17674372>. Access on 28/09/2014.

Expansion Commissioner, Stefan Füle, openly defended the entry of Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldavia in the European integration process. Obviously, the geographic, military and political expansion of a military alliance against the borders of a country cannot result in trust patterns or pacifist answers.

In addition to the expansion of NATO and the European Union, it should be stressed other Western initiatives designed to limit Russia's sphere of maneuver in international politics. First, the US government of newly elected George W. Bush withdrew the country in 2001 of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), signed in 1972 with the USSR, aiming to carry forward the idea of building a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic. In 2008, the three countries signed an agreement providing for the installation of this system with a base of ten interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar detector in the Czech Republic, provoking strong reactions of President Medvedev and the retreat of President Obama. Such as Byers (2007, 187) calls attention for, besides the ABM, the U.S. government rejected the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, an agreement on the sale and transfer of small weapons and a protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention.

Second, post-Cold War U.S. interventionism and unilateralism have led to insecurity. Note that such demonstrations of force are concentrated in the strategic surroundings of Russia, especially interventions in the Balkans, at the time of Yugoslavia's disintegration, and in Afghanistan, with the Global War on Terror declaration. In parallel, the U.S. took the opportunity to expand its force projection capability with the construction of the Uzbek air base of Khanabad and the Manas airport in Kyrgyzstan. Such presence in the region was confronted by Russia and China through the SCO, which resulted in the closure of these military bases in 2005 and 2014, respectively⁴. In addition, many interventions have occurred exceeding the mandates given by the United Nations, as the attacks on Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011). Without exception,

⁴ See the news on the radio Voice of Russia website: http://portuguese.ruvr.ru/news/2014_06_03/Base-acea-dos-EUA-no-Quirguistao-oficialmente-encerrada-7774/. Access on 07/10/2014.

from Somalia (1993) to Libya and Syria (2013-14), all interventions have had tragic results in any perspective.

Third, there was an open support for opposition groups in Russian neighboring countries. The “color revolutions” are illustrative: the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004) and the Tulips Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005). Clearly, these are the XXI century coups, with large mobilization of intelligence, financial assets, non-governmental organizations performances, etc. As Bandeira highlights, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)⁵, established in 1983 by U.S. Congress induction, operates as an agent of public diplomacy doing what was once considered a task of State Department, CIA and Embassies secret operations, using the rhetoric of financing and promoting democracy to change governments or sustain allies (Bandeira 2013, 39). In fact, Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997) had been very clear in recommending Western control over Ukraine as a geopolitical pivot in the containment of an Eurasian Russia.

In short, Russian government’s perception and responses must be analyzed in the light of overcoming internal vulnerabilities and external threats related to the growing U.S. unilateralism and interventionism in the post-Cold War. That is, U.S. governments have sought to expand the scope of powers of the UN Security Council; to create resolutions with intentional ambiguity or implied authorizations to open gaps for using force; to build justifications such as inherent rights of preemptive defense, humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect to intervene without the consent of international organizations; and, simultaneously, to neglect the importance of international law for the protection of combatants and civilians (Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib), and for courts and tribunals for war crimes⁶, as the ICC (Byers 2007). The expansion of the security agenda by the superpower and the consequent weakening of the concept of sovereignty are two sides of the same coin; and one of the major challenges to peripheral and emerging countries with independent claims in the international system.

⁵ With the support of civil organizations such as Freedom House, USAID, Open Society, among others.

⁶ Perhaps because they were allies of the US in certain opportunities, Saddam, Bin Laden and Gaddafi could only have had an end without a fair trial. Farcical trial or extrajudicial physical elimination helped hide promiscuous relationships with the most contradictory facets of these leaders cited.

The “New Cold War” Discourse

To understand the logic of the “New Cold War” discourse, it may be better to turn to U.S. history of international insertion. In a perspective approach, it is observed the exceptionality role of its foreign policy. The blurring of religion and politics, whose expression are the presidential speeches invoking “God bless America”, is translated in concepts such as “holy war”, “chosen people”, and “imperial mission” (Losurdo 2010). In the US, liberal democracy is the self-government of the white and proprietary communities (“democracy for the people of the lords”), of Western supremacy, while revealing the mission to explore and/or “civilize” the colonial peoples (Losurdo 2006a). Red-skinned, Mexican, Nazis, Communists and Islamic terrorists have populated the imaginary and the expansionist discourse of US governments over time. Most of the times using an universalist and liberal discourse to operate ethnocentric and imperial interests (Losurdo 2006b).

In this sense, the USSR disintegration has created a vacuum in the U.S. discourse to affirm the momentary unipolarity situation. In order to redesign its foreign policy, the US government raised the discourse of neoliberalism and the “end of history”. The social costs of liberalizing reforms accelerated counter-trends that depleted over the 1990s. In any case, as highlights Bandeira (2013, 52; 91-99), at the strategic level, they worked to advance over the spoils of Soviet disintegration, as it is clear at the Defense Planning Guidance document of 1990. It is in this context that one should understand NATO expansion, the creation of the GUAM group (Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) in 1999 as a military organization and the “colored revolutions” (regime change) in Russia’s surroundings.

With the entry into the XXI century, the 11 September attacks provided the “propaganda reason” for the Global War on Terror’s implementation. And the Patriot Act deepened the relationship between civil liberties restrictions, underground operations and foreign interventionism (Bandeira 2005). The “green peril” (Islamic terrorism) had been created to replace the “red peril” (Communism). The Global War on Terror legitimized aggression and hostility against countries with no linkages with Al-Qaeda’s Sunnis, such as the secular regime of Saddam, the Shia government of Iran and the communist North Korea. It was a way to give global dimension to American exceptionalism: under the allegation of ensuring their safety at any

cost, it was legitimized “preemptive strikes”; under the pretext of defending democracy and freedom, the use of force was openly used; and, in the defense of universality, the Islamophobia has spread. In the past, they financed the Taliban for later intervene in Afghanistan in 2001; now they supported the Libyan and Syrian “rebels” for later on bomb the Islamic State (IS) with the Persian Gulf monarchies – historical supporters of the most fundamentalist segments of Islam, such as the ones from the IS.

Looking into perspective, in the Eurasian region’s case, it might be observed: 1) the rise of interventionism in the Greater Middle East and the region, as the Kuwait invasion (1991), the intervention in Somalia (1993), the aggression against Afghanistan from 2001, the war against Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011) and the attempts to overthrow the Syrian government since 2011; 2) and a growing presence in Russia’s surroundings, including the intervention in the former Yugoslavia, the implementation of military bases in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea, the pressure against North Korea and Iran, the acting in favor of anti-Russian governments in its near abroad (Georgia and Ukraine) and the expansion of NATO itself.

It is in this aspect that lays the continuity line between the schizophrenic role in the Middle East and towards Russia’s case: create conditions to forge an enemy. Create friction and threats on the Russian border and wait firm responses as a way to develop Russophobia and try to isolate the Eurasian country. This is what is observed in this emblematic case of the current conflict unleashed in Ukraine (2014), the 2nd Orange Revolution: it has been promoted a coup supporting fascist orientation groups, encouraging the entry of a country that is an integral part of Russian history in NATO and the EU. The Russian response, with the annexation of Crimea and the support to the uprisings in the provinces of eastern Ukraine (Lugansk and Donetsk), create tensions that meet the wedge role to confront Russian and European interests – just as it was with Yugoslavia’s disintegration. Thus, the U.S. prevent the formation of a Heartland, or, a possible Berlin-Moscow-Beijing axis completely out of Washington’s control.

These conflicts foster anti-Russian sentiments in Europe, nursing a rhetoric that the West would be the mainstay of liberalism and democracy, as opposed to the authoritarian and expansionist bias of Russia. It is interesting to

observe the current view among important European intellectuals, such as Pierre Hassner (2008), according to which Putin is taking Russia from a democracy to an autocracy. Convenient, perhaps, to forget that Yeltsin's Russian government, allied with the West, has responsibilities on the disorganization of the country, whose effects include the mafia's strengthening, the closing of parties and even the parliament bombing in 1993! As stated by Colin (2007, 50-51), Yeltsin era was, rather, a retreat of democracy to the point that the term has acquired a pejorative sense for many ordinary Russians.

On the same line follows João Almeida's explanation, assistant to the President of the European Commission and director of the Portuguese Institute of National Defense, when he argues that Russia is a Clausewitzian of the nineteenth century for using war as a political mean, while Europe is the XXI century of Kantian peace (Almeida 2008). These Manichean divisions do not contribute to the understanding of the contradictions that pervade the European and Russian spaces in these centuries. Dialectically, the major European powers were also promoters of imperialism in the nineteenth century; the epicenter of the two bloody World Wars; and, after that, and already concomitantly with European integration, the responsible for violent wars against national liberation movements. In the post-Cold War, Western powers were the craftsmen of Yugoslavia's traumatic disintegration, of the European Union's expansion in the former Soviet space, of destabilizing regimes in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004 and 2014) in favor of fascist profile regimes. Not to mention their contribution to the political and territorial destruction of countries objects of intervention such as Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011). Russia, by contrast, was the scene of the XX century's most important revolution, central to the universalization of social rights, including in the Welfare State Europe, and for combating the most retrograde political force of the century, the Nazi fascism.

Anyway, intellectuals, politicians and the great Western media have fostered a Russophobic speech, feeding back typical feelings of the Cold War period's anti-communist frenzy. However, as highlights Henry Kissinger when referring to the West, "the demonization of Vladimir Putin is not politics, it is

an alibi for his absence”⁷ (Kissinger 2014). In addition to the demonization of its leadership, its initiatives are always presented as hostile, as in the case of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization creation, often called as an anti-Western military alliance by both the mainstream media⁸ and by intellectuals (Marketos 2009, 61). In contrast, the Organization emerged aimed at combating terrorism, fundamentalism and separatism in the region, while strengthening in all documents the imperative of multilateral organizations in conflict resolution.

It is obvious that the Russian government understands the motivations emanating from the “New Cold War” speech. The enemy construction is part of a central feature of American exceptionalism and, indeed, of its international history. However as said the Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, Moscow does not intend to be involved in the use of “primitive standards” for the straight confrontation between Russia and the West⁹. This explains, as we shall see, Russia’s answers to the siege, including a combination of deterrence, demonstrations of force and movements to build new international alignments.

The resurgence of Russia and its responses

The Russian calculation that the opening to the West would be the best international insertion option reveals more than unpreparedness, but the level of promiscuity from the Russian elite led by Yeltsin during the 1990s. The looting and the dismantling of state capacities resulted in an unprecedented weakening of Russia. In order to keep certain domestic legitimacy (with nationalist sectors) and to have the means to negotiate with the West, at times this government had to reduce the urge of this integration model based on alignment. The appointment of Evgenii Primakov in 1996 to the Foreign Ministry represented this reaffirmation of the Russian foreign policy’s autonomist movement. Primakov set as Russia’s permanent interest the

⁷ See article in the Washington Post “To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a496-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html. Access on 09/10/2014.

⁸ See news in the German DW site: <http://www.dw.de/anti-western-alliance-in-asia/a-17914677>. Access on 19/10/2014.

⁹ See news on the Voice of Russia website: http://portuguese.ruvr.ru/news/2014_10_13/Moscou-se-op-e-a-esquemas-primitivos-de-confronto-com-pa-ses-ocidentais-4911/. Access on 13/10/2014.

creation of external conditions for strengthening its territorial integrity, the recovery of its ascendancy over former Soviet space and the prevention of conflicts, especially ethnic, on its regional environment (CIS and Yugoslavia), as well as focus of weapons of mass destruction (Donaldson and Noguee 2005, 131).

The nomination of Putin as Prime Minister in 1999, followed by its election in 2000, deepened the orientations initiated by Primakov. The choice of Sergei Lavrov to the Russian Foreign Ministry since 2004 consolidates the affirmation of an autonomous and increasingly assertive foreign policy. It is possible to say, following the line of MacFarlane (2009, 98-99), that Russian policy has been pragmatic, seeking to address its weaknesses and knowing about the US preponderance, but now without giving up its priorities, such as to restore or preserve the influence over its immediate border and to regain the lost status of power.

The recovery of state capacities has been a tortuous route from the Soviet inheritance, the drawbacks of the 1990s and the difficulties of an international scenario in which the US could exert unprecedented supremacy. Thus, Russia has sought to recover its military structure, after the scrapping and partial disorganization of the superpower heritage that happened during the Yeltsin government. For that, the country restored the naval fleet in the port of Tartus, in Syria, and in Crimea. Among the newly developed equipment, it is included the anti-aircraft missile system S-300 with a range up to 300km; the new generation attack helicopter Ka-52; the first strategic missile-port cruiser submarine from project 941 Akula, with 20 ballistic missile of 8.3km range; the medium multi-mission helicopter Mi-8 for passenger, cargo and weapons transport; the mobile Soviet-Russian strategic land missile system equipped with intercontinental ballistic missiles of 11,000km range; the 5th generation fighters, among others¹⁰. Remembering that in response to US proposals for the deployment of a missile shield in Europe, Russia installed

¹⁰ See news on the Voice of Russia website: http://portuguese.ruvr.ru/2014_09_19/photo-As-armas-mais-poderosas-da-Russia-8620/?slide-1. Access on 13/10/2014.

Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad¹¹ and did not dismantle the three missile regiments (with 10,000km range) in Kozelsk.

Another sector that required major changes was the hydrocarbon sector. The government has retaken the stock control over the main companies in the sector, encouraging the creation of national champions with the ability to compete globally; renegotiation of the relationship with foreign firms in order to internalize technologies and capital; and tax reform aimed to capture the oil income in favor of national development, among others (Schutte 2011). In addition to national strengthening, Russia has used hydrocarbons as a tool of its foreign policy. In 2006, 2009 and 2014, the Russian government has stopped the supply of gas, compromising Ukraine and other European markets. Behind the battle between the Russian state company Gazprom, which charges price adjustments and debts, and the Ukrainian government, which bargain prices and charges for the transit of gas to Europe, is the usage of this power resource as a bargaining tool.

In the same direction was the recent agreement reached between Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) in the natural gas sector. The pipelined called Siberian Force is a deal with a 30 years validity and delivery, from 2018, of 38 billion cubic meters of gas annually, with a total value estimated at about 400 billion dollars¹². This shift to the East is added to the Siberia-Pacific pipeline (East Siberia-Pacific Ocean – ESPO), whose inauguration in 2012 has allowed the export of 300 thousand barrels of oil per day over its approximately 4,200km extension to China and other countries in the region¹³. Even though negotiations were previous to the conflicts with Ukraine and the EU, as well as the Western embargoes, Western hostility has forced Russia to seek eastern markets, as with the finalization of the agreement for the construction of Siberian Force. If for China it was an important means of diversifying energy supply, for Russia it accounted as a signal in the sense

¹¹ See news on the Voice of Russia website: http://portuguese.ruvr.ru/news/2014_09_01/Russia-comecou-construcao-de-gasoduto-para-Asia-2545/. Access on 13/10/2014.

¹² See news on BBC Brasil website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/portuguese/noticias/2014/05/140521_china_russia_analise_jm_cc. Access on 13/10/2014.

¹³ See news on Reuters Brasil website: <http://br.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idBRSP8BN04S20121224>. Access on 13/10/2014.

that it can find new customers faster than Europe could find new hydrocarbon suppliers.

Agreements in the hydrocarbon sector are only one aspect of the Sino-Russian rapprochement that has evolved since the mid-1990s. For both, the bilateral relationship was configured as an alternative international insertion that allows resistance to US pressure and its allies in the West. Although Sino-Russian relations, obviously, do not be devoid of mistrust and competition, at the current state it characterizes as a necessary approach. Not surprisingly, as highlighted (Pautasso 2011a), Russia has developed a policy of rapprochement with China on numerous fronts, including the development of security and integration organization (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS), cooperation under the strategic-military field, trade and investments, energy infrastructure integration, among others. In fact, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization strengthening, created in 2001 from the Shanghai Group of Five (1996), is part of Putin's Russia's efforts to seek to reconstruct a sphere of influence, even to fill the vacuum left by the USSR disintegration and later due to the ineffectiveness of the Community of Independent States (CIS). Besides SCO, it was signed this year the constituent treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, which will come into force in 2015, with the possible accession of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan¹⁴.

On the diplomatic-military sphere, Russia responded to attempts to include Georgia and Ukraine in the military alliance (NATO) and to the construction of the Missile Shield in Poland and the Czech Republic. Even leaders of the US staff, such as Henry Kissinger, understand that to include Ukraine in NATO is an affront to Russia and that leaves it trapped. To this end, the same author justifies that the Eurasian country was born from Kieva-Rus, where its main ethnicity and religion was find, as well as its greatest political and military battles (Kissinger 2014). This observation of Kissinger may help to understand why it has been unequivocally the demonstrations of force in the war with Georgia in 2008 and in the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. In both cases, Russia did not hesitate in front of Western maneuvers, with coups

¹⁴ See news on Voice of Russia website: http://portuguese.ruvr.ru/news/2014_09_30/Uniao-Aduaneira-e-Uniao-Eurasiatica-alagam-suas-fileiras-3552/. Access on 19/10/2014.

and signs of entry in its military alliance (NATO), and has reacted actively. In either case, the Russian government supported groups of same ethnicity or sympathizers, such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and Crimea, Donetsk and Lugansk in Ukraine. As Putin stressed, on the annexation of Crimea's speech, this initiative is as legitimate as Ukraine's independence in 1991 or Kosovo's in 2008. These cases, according to him, are based on Article 2, Chapter 1 of the UN Charter, noting that the International Court agreed with this approach on 22 July 2010 when addressing that neither the Security Council nor general international laws contains any prohibition to declarations of independence¹⁵.

This way, for Russia, the current conflict in Ukraine does not represent a problem in relation to international law or to the military supremacy that it has in the region, but it is instead due to attempts to isolate it, reinforcing Russophobia in the West. The reverse of the coin, however, is that Ukraine lost (temporarily at least), three provinces, its most important industrial area, much of its Navy, the coal resources and access to the Russian market and its subsidized gas. For such, it obtained promises of a limited Europe in severe socioeconomic situation and an IMF loan with fiscal adjustments at a very high social cost. Ukraine, which had been presenting trade deficits since 2005¹⁶, for all it seems, will be reduced, still further, to a primary-exporting country in the regional division of labor.

The state capacities' strengthening in Russia gave conditions for it to respond to the constraints arising from the tensions that these wars and conflicts generated. After the conflicts in Ukraine, the US government urged Europe to sanction Russia after the Crimea's annexation as a way to put it on the defensive. Rather than acknowledge the coup, the Russian government introduced retaliatory sanctions against the European Union, whose annualized values surpassed 11 billion Euros and 10% of European exports¹⁷. The effects of the Ukrainian conflict made the Russian veto towards Western food products

¹⁵ Putin speech on the Crimea annexation: <http://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2014/03/leia-integra-do-discurso-em-que-putim-reconhece-crimea.html>. Access on 19/10/2014.

¹⁶ Ukraine trade data: <http://www.datosmacro.com/comercio/balanza/ucrania>. Access on 19/10/2014.

¹⁷ See news on the Voice of Russia website: http://portuguese.ruvr.ru/news/2014_09_22/Produtores-europeus-comecam-a-sentir-efeitos-do-embargo-russo-3066/. Access on 13/10/2014.

turn into opportunities for new suppliers in South America¹⁸. Taking the opportunity, and in response to attempts to isolate it, the Russian government has intensified its presence in Latin America. In an attempt to reduce US influence in this geographical area, the Latin American countries, many governed by center-left parties, have taken advantage of this scenario to diversify its international relations. In July 2014, Putin made a tour in the region, signing important agreements¹⁹ with Cuba, Argentina and Brazil²⁰, in key sectors such as hydrocarbons, nuclear energy, military equipment, among others.

The Russian leadership's unquestionable return may be evidenced in the last decade in other relevant topics of the international system. These are the cases of the Middle Eastern conflicts related to Iran and Syria. In the first case, during the Western siege against Ahmadinejad's government, with various pretexts ranging from democracy to the nuclear program, the Russian government have supported Iran and led negotiations. Russia has become one of Iran's major trading partners and cooperated in strategic sectors such as the nuclear one and oil – in this latter case, allowing to connect, in 2011, the first plant in Bushehr to the country's power grid²¹. In addition, the Russian government has boosted a negotiated solution to the Iranian nuclear program through the P5+1 conversations (China, USA, France, Russia, United Kingdom and Germany) with Iran. In the case of Syria, Russia worked actively to the stabilization of the country under Assad's leadership, seeking a political solution, either rejecting the use of force, or building the agreement to the Syrian chemical arsenal delivery. In fact, Russia had warned that the so-called

¹⁸See news from Diario de Pernambuco: http://www.diariodepernambuco.com.br/app/noticia/economia/2014/08/07/internas_economia.521204/embargo-russo-castiga-produtores-europeus-e-pode-beneficiar-america-latina.shtml. Access on 13/10/2014.

¹⁹ See news from RT website: <http://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/view/133381-presidente-putin-gira-america-latina>. Access on 27/09/2014.

²⁰ In the case of Brazil, several acts were signed, including the one in the military-technical sector which provides for the acquisition of anti-aircraft system Pantsir I. Available in the MRE website: <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/sala-de-imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/atos-assinados-por-ocasio-da-visita-ao-brasil-do-presidente-da-federacao-da-russia-vladimir-putin-brasilia-14-de-julho-de-2014>. Access on 27/09/2014.

²¹ See DW news: <http://www.dw.de/rela%C3%A7%C3%B5es-entre-r%C3%BAssia-e-ir%C3%A3-s%C3%A3o-marcadas-pelo-pragmatismo/a-16799526>. Access on 19/10/2014.

Syrian rebels were Islamist groups linked to Al-Qaeda, anticipating the problem linked to the Islamic State²².

However, perhaps the most important Russian initiative takes place within the BRICS grouping. The BRICS Fourth Summit, and its Declaration of Fortaleza, held in July 2014, resulted in the creation of the New BRICS Development Bank (NBD) and the Contingency Arrangement of Reserves (ACD), with initial capital of \$ 50 billion and \$ 100, respectively. There is no doubt that it reveals the new distribution of international reserves around the world and, as noted by Ramos et al (2012), the consequent construction of a new financial architecture in response to the constrained space given to emerging countries at the Bretton Woods system (dollar, IMF and World Bank). Moreover, it is, above all, an alternative to neoliberalism and its Washington Consensus – in favor, obviously, of the state role as a development vector. As three of the BRICS members are Asian, and in that region of East Asia reside the highest rates of economic growth, one can substantiate Arrighi's (2001) argument of the economy's epicenter shift to Asia. And if China is its pivot, we would be walking to the Sinocentric system's (re) construction (Pautasso 2011b).

In short, Russia, despite and in the light of the weaknesses that came from the Soviet collapse, will not passively accept that a new cordon sanitaire be constituted through alliances and military infrastructure (NATO, bases and missile shield) and/or the support to anti-Russian regimes (via “colored revolutions”) at its border. In fact, part of Russia's elite also realizes this, and the very destabilization of Syria, the threats to Iran, as part of the siege to the Caucasus and, therefore, to Russia – which would undermine the control over major oil routes and access to hot water ports (Tartus in Syria and Odessa in Ukraine), besides opening gaps for domestic destabilization (separatist movements). In addition, Russia already has many challenges related to its demographic collapse (Vishnevsky 2009) and/or towards the necessity to diversify its productive structures (Pomeranz 2012).

²² See news at Estadão website: <http://internacional.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,russia-e-eua-discutem-genebra-acordo-para-armas-quimicas-da-siria,1073983>. Access on 19/10/2014.

Final considerations

The Vladimir Putin government came into power in Russia in a situation of great economic, political-territorial and diplomatic-geopolitical vulnerabilities. Given this situation, Putin had to mobilize the power resources at its disposal to reorganize the country and to recover the leading role on the international stage. On the Western side, Russia tried to earn time with a tense and negotiated coexistence with NATO, even though it had to face a systematic expansion and recurring shows of force (Yugoslavia). On the Eastern front, the country has been integrating with China through the intensification of bilateral relations and the SCO construction. At the same time, due to the increasing constraints, the Russian government has resorted to the use of force to set limits, as during the occupations of the Pristina airport (1999), the invasion of Georgia (2008), and the conflict with Ukraine (2014). The fact is that since Primakov's rise to the Russian Foreign Ministry (1996), and later with Putin's leadership, the Russian government has been ceasing to feed hopes of the US/Western policy for the region. There is, therefore, a clear contradiction between the US unipolar and unilateral claims and the multipolarization and multilateralisation trends intended, among others, by emerging countries and Russia.

The 2008 crisis in the international system's epicenter and the emerging regions' projection, nucleated by BRICS, reveals that history exposes its contradictions and conflicts, accelerates its course and poses new challenges. At the same time that such challenges mount up, hopelessness generates various forms of escape from reality, while those that should forge alternatives to the barbaric manifestations (the left), part deny their identity (and history), and part limit themselves too much to the electoral routine, consuming efforts that should also be devoted to thinking about the future.

On the international arena, the new power configurations rise among the old ones and manifest themselves in many different ways²³. Certainly, the emerging countries and Russia are protagonists of this new scenario. The risk not properly calculated by the U.S. is that its policy of containing Russia, with

²³ See our article written on the strengthening of South-South relations (Pautasso 2011c).

unilateralism and destabilization of the border regions, has reverse effects, since it deepens nationalism, accelerates the state capacities' strengthening and stimulates Russian autonomist foreign policy. And it can, in the search for new allies capable to avoid the Russian siege and isolation, accelerates the ongoing changes in the international system.

This new historical framework generates growing perplexity and difficulty to the U.S. government, since they are not used to play chess with a large and growing number of chess players. And the unilateral calculation has generated unexpected responses and undesired results to the U.S.. That is, the contradictions in U.S. foreign policy are rapidly redesigning the chessboard. The rhetoric in favor of the end of chess (history) actually defended the actions of just one chess player (U.S.). It should be recognized, however, that the chessboard is more dynamic with the new chess players' performance, though also less predictable, especially in the light of certain theoretical traditions. After Russia would like and before the U.S. hoped, the Eurasian country passed from a piece to the chess master.

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ABSTRACT

The present article has the objective to analyze Russia's challenges in its reemergence as a world power after the presidency of Vladimir Putin. The central argument is that this reemergence evidenced the American historical contention policy against Russia. However, we suggest that this contention policy has reversal effects, for deepens nationalism, accelerates the strengthening of state capabilities and stimulates an autonomous Russian diplomacy. Thus, it quickens Russia's return as a great chess player of the international arena instead of containing the Eurasian country.

KEYWORDS

Russia; "New Cold War"; West.

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