

The Bear beyond the ocean.

Kremlin's relations with Latin America as a crucial step for Russia going back to a great power *status*

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Introduction

The topic of this article are Russia's foreign relations with Latin American States. Our core statement is that Russia, in its twenty-year existence, changed its relations with Central-South America following this sequence: first utilitarian economic contacts with a single State; then, further ones, with an increasing number of countries, motivated by geopolitical reasons and mutual-benefit agreements; and at the end the evolution of some of these contacts into solid political alliances. We believe that the process we described is a special part of a much wider action. Through the analysis of this crucial element of Russia's complex and multi-vectorial foreign policy, we found convincing evidences of the successful, but still ongoing attempt of the Russian Federation to reemerge on the international arena as a major super-power. We refer to Russia's action toward former Us 'backyard' as the 'western expansion hand' of a 'quadruple-directed action'.

By 'quadruple-directed action' we mean that Russia's moves have been concentrated to five geopolitical areas: Central-Eastern Europe, Asia, Middle East, Africa and South America. With 'western expansion hand' we refer to the nature of Russia's behavior in one of these geopolitical areas, Latin America. We use the terms expansion and conservation/containment to classify the character of Moscow's conduct, relating it to the improvement/worsening of Russia's geo-strategic position after the end of the Cold War. We use the first concept when Russia's actual position improved and went beyond the results achieved by the USSR, while we refer to the latter terms if in the present situation we can see a worsening of Russia's condition. These terms do not refer to the effective nature of Moscow's actions and we want to stress clearly that when we refer to Russian actions aimed at containment this might refer even to military operations (whether if offensive or defensive).

In Central-Eastern Europe Russia did not have neither the capabilities nor the political will to undertake any expansion action and tried to preserve its influence and power over the former Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Generally speaking, we state that

Russia's actions in Europe were aimed at the containment of Western influence, in a geo-strategic situation which greatly worsened after the end of the Cold War.

In the Middle East-North Africa, Russia maintained medium-high level contacts, based on arms trade, with three former Cold War allies (Algeria, one of the biggest importer of Russian weapons, Syria and Libya), and made a move towards Iran. This move however resulted in a failure because of Medvedev's unwillingness to honor a contract signed with Teheran for saling the anti-aircraft missile system S-300, which caused great concern in Washington and Tel Aviv. Russia maintains also good relations with the Palestinian National Authority (Pna) and Hamas; however, the uprisings which spread all around the Middle East and caused the demise of the Libyan Jamahiriya and an ongoing weakening of Bashar al-Asad's power in Syria has jeopardized Russia's influence in the area. Regarding sub-Saharan Africa, Kremlin's ties are primarily economic-focused, with the exception of South-Africa, whose accession to Brics has a strong political relevance. Generally speaking we state that Russia's position met an expansion trend from the economic point of view, while Cold War political alliances disappeared with USSR's fall.

In Asia, Russia started an action which combines expansion and containment trends: on the one hand the Kremlin tried once more to maintain and improve its influence on the former Ssr's; on the other hand, Moscow greatly improved its political relations with an old Cold War-ally, India, and an old Cold War-adversary/competitor, China (both members of Brics). The trade in weaponry with both nations reared up and Russia started joint projects with India for the development of high-tech weapons. Another Russian important partner for military trade is Indonesia.

Generally speaking we state that the Kremlin improved its position in Asia; however, the situation remains critical for Russia, due to the instability of the area which extends from Afghanistan-Pakistan to the Central Asian Republics and because of China's growing economic influence.

Russia's actions in the third area we listed, South America, are characterized by a strong expansion trend followed by the improvement of Russia's position, compared to USSR's one.

Ussr relations with Latin America: stepping in the 'lion's den'

Soviet Union's political and later on military presence in Central-Latin America came into existence when the little island of Cuba entered into its sphere of influence. Since that moment, Cuba remained strongly connected with the USSR till the latter disrupted; in 1972 it also became the first non Eurasian member of Comecon¹.

In fact the USSR was politically unprepared for the possible appearance of a socialist State in the American continent, nor it had a real picture of the Cuban

¹ Kennedy-Pipe Caroline, *Russia and the world 1917-1991*, London, Arnold, 1998.

revolution's nature: the initial perception of the Kremlin was that the Us was getting rid of one of its former puppets, which became obsolete. Political chameleon Fidel Castro initially did not facilitate the task for the Ussr but, less than one year after the triumph of the revolution, some of the most generous Soviet loans and supplies ever granted started to flow in the direction of Cuba.

Another notable Soviet involvement in Central America has been the support given by the Kremlin to the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Fsln) insurrection in Nicaragua. After the Sandinistas came to power, Nicaragua was admitted in 1984 into Comecon with the *status* of Observer Member – *status* which was previously granted to Mexico in 1975, although «there has been little basis to conclude that Us influence in Mexico has deteriorated on account of such an agreement»². Finally, Moscow has been repeatedly accused of delivering weapons to various Central American guerrilla movements through Soviet-friendly Cuba and Nicaragua, but without any accountable evidence ever found.

Regarding South America, Moscow's first relationship was with Peru: in 1968 General Juan Velasco Alvarado seized power with a *coup d'État* and in 1973 Lima established diplomatic relations with the Ussr, starting to import Soviet weapons. During the years this trade increased in quantity and quality and the Kremlin even sent some 125 military experts into the country. Ironically, the first Soviet weapons arrived in Latin America only weeks after the overthrow of Allende's socialist government in Chile, who was openly supported by the Soviet Union. Following the Peruvian example, Argentina started to buy Soviet weaponry and in the Eighties it became Moscow's second largest partner in the military sphere among non-communist States.

Russia and Latin America in the Nineties: 'pay-back need' and 'changing winds' in the Kremlin

The collapse of the Soviet bloc and of the Ussr itself brought to an end the period of fraternal cooperation: the Comecon was shut down and with it all the generous loans that the Kremlin had granted until that time to its near and far allies.

The Russian leadership, stuck in a complex and very difficult transition, had only one good reason to restart some kind of contact with Cuba: money or, better, getting Ussr's money back. Cuba still owed Russia for the exorbitant amount of \$20 billion. Already before the breaking up of Ussr, relations between Moscow and Havana worsened, but Castro, until nearly the very end, was anyway able to keep a reluctant Gorbachev supporting Cuba³. Despite the major reversal caused by Ussr's collapse, foreign relations between Moscow and Havana never stopped completely and quite soon they started to improve again because of «debt's

² Robert M. Unterberger, *When Comecon comes calling: the potential for a joint declaration and mutual recognition between the Eec and Comecon*, 11 B.C. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev. 137, 1988.

³ Alexander Dallin, Gail W. Lapidus (eds.), *The Soviet system in crisis, a reader of Western and Soviet views*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1995.

continuing influence [on Moscow]», but also due to the fact that «oil for sugar [agreements] remained important for both countries»⁴.

Quite surprisingly «in 1996 Russia [became] Cuba's most important trading partner», while just in 1992 «the level of trade between the two fell to 7% of 1991 volume»⁵. However, the real reverse in Russian-Cuban relations came with Yevgeny Primakov, who succeeded to the pro-Atlantic Andrei Kozyrev at Foreign Ministry, in January 1996.

To give an idea of their diverging approaches to Russia, we can quote a conversation which took place in the early Nineties between Kozyrev and former Us President Richard Nixon, reported by Primakov himself in his memoir: «Nixon asked Kozyrev to outline the national interests of the new Russia. And Kozyrev said: "You know, Mr. President, one of the problems of the Soviet Union was that we were obsessed with national interest. Now we are thinking more about human values. But if you have some ideas that you can share with us about how to determine our national interests, I will be very thankful to you"»⁶.

During his Latin American trip in 1997, Primakov said: «Russia was and still is a great power. As a great power or one of the main players in the international arena, Russia, naturally, should have multilateral ties with all continents, with all regions of the world»⁷. Primakov was the perfect envoy to Cuba, given the fact that he shared with the Cuban *élite* their «dislike for the unipolar nature of global politics in the post-Soviet era [and had] personal affinity [...] towards the island»⁸, but he was also the right man to expand Russian partnerships in Latin America. In 1997 the Russia-Cuba Commission on Commercial, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation was created and the Brazil-Russia Cooperation Treaty was signed⁹.

The new millennium: crisis of Us neoliberal order and new perspectives for furthering Russia's involvement in Latin America

The new millennium opened with the election of Vladimir Putin, former Boris Eltsin's pupil, as President of the Russian Federation. Soon after his election Putin realized a deep and broad reshaping of Russia¹⁰. The previous

⁴ Mervyn J. Bain, *Russian-Cuban relations since 1992: continuing camaraderie in a post-Soviet world*, New York, Lexington Books, 2008, p. 147.

⁵ Robert H. Donaldson, Joseph L. Noguee, *The foreign policy of Russia, changing systems, enduring interests*, Armonk, M. E. Sharpe, 2009, p. 334.

⁶ Yevgeny Primakov, *Russian crossroads: toward the new millennium*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, p. 126.

⁷ Stephen J. Blank, *Russia and Latin America: motives and consequences*, University of Miami, Center for Hemispheric Policy, Challenges to Security in the Hemisphere Task Force, April 13, 2010, p. 4, https://www6.miami.edu/hemispheric-policy/Blank_miamirusia_04-13-10.pdf.

⁸ Bain, *Op.cit.*, pp. 149-151.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Main cause of this reorientation was the idea that: «Some of the expectations for the emergence of new, equitable and mutually beneficial relations of partnership between Russia and the surrounding world, as set forth in the Basic Provisions of the Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation, have not materialized» (Andrei Melville, Tatiana Shakleina (eds.), *Russian foreign policy in transition: concept and realities*, New York, Ceu Press, 2005, p. 89); Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian foreign policy: the return of great power politics*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

élite was removed from power, while the new President went on in the direction that men like Primakov laid down in the previous years.

Soon after his stepping in as President, Putin decided to take a very symbolic trip to Cuba. In December 2000 for the first time a post-Soviet Russian leader walked the ground of the Caribbean island and met with the *Lider máximo*. It would be naïve to neglect the ongoing importance of the enormous Cuban debt, which was actually one of the main topics discussed by the two leaders. However, as stated earlier, after the time of utilitarian economic contacts with a single State came further ones with an increasing number of countries, motivated by geopolitical reasons and mutual-benefit purposes. In 2000 the first phase was ending and the second one was taking over. Even if Putin himself stated that «we have no union with Cuba against third countries, including the United States»¹¹, the general opinion was that, metaphorically, he visited Cuba «to thumb his nose at Us»¹².

The general tendency was to increasing Russia's influence in Latin America, along with the latter's mounting disillusion towards the Us, its actions and its neo-liberal model¹³. The political outcome of this dissatisfaction was a general turn of nearly whole the continent to the left.

As Peter M. Sanchez wrote: «the neoliberal economic model that the Us has promoted has not yet brought a better standard of living to most of the people in those countries [i.e. Latin America]; democracy has not resulted in governments that are sufficiently responsive to the interests of their citizens; the Us is once again being viewed as an interventionist, unilateralist country [the Author refers to Us invasion of Iraq in 2003], and most people in Latin America know well the history of extensive Us military and economic intervention in their region»¹⁴.

A first sign of this disillusionment was the victory of the socialist Hugo Chavez in Venezuelan presidential elections, in 1999¹⁵. Many other countries followed the path of Venezuela: Bolivia and Nicaragua in 2006, Ecuador in 2007. All these countries jointly implemented the project of Socialism of the XXI Century¹⁶ and adhered to Alba (*Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de*

¹¹ Patrick E. Tyler, *Vladimir Putin, in Cuba, signals priority of ties to Us*, «New York Times», December 16, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/16/world/VladimirPutin-in-cuba-signals-priority-of-ties-to-us.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

¹² Yuri Zarakhovich, *Vladimir Putin visits Cuba to tumb his nose at Us*, «Time», December 13, 2000, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,91727,00.html>.

¹³ The only exception is Russia's cooperation with Brazil, which resulted to be unaffected by political changes. In 2001 the conservative government and the Kremlin established the Brazilian-Russian Governmental Commission and after the victory of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003, leader of the Worker's Party, the crucial Brazil-Russia Military Technology and Transfer Pact was signed.

¹⁴ Peter M. Sanchez, *How to restore America's courtyard*, «Heartland-Limes», February 16, 2009, <http://temi.repubblica.it/limes-heartland/how-to-restore-america%E2%80%99s-courtyard/718>.

¹⁵ Nikolas Kozloff, *Revolution! South America and the rise of the New Left*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.

¹⁶ An ideological concept formulated by professor Heinz Dieterich, which he summarizes as: «a socialism in which the majorities have the greatest historically possible degree of decision-making power in the economic, political, cultural and military institutions that govern their lives» [Cristina Marciano, Interview with Heiz Dieterich, Venezuelan analysis, January 5, 2007, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2162>].

Nuestra América, initially set up by Chavez's Venezuela and Cuba), signing the Peoples' Trade Agreement¹⁷.

Other Latin American countries turned to a more moderate left: Brazil and Argentina in 2003, Honduras and Uruguay in 2005, Peru and Chile in 2006 (however, in Santiago de Chile the conservatives regained power in 2010), Guatemala in 2007, Paraguay in 2008 and El Salvador in 2009¹⁸. The new leaders of these countries «are not necessarily anti-Us but are nevertheless questioning the Us economic model of neo-liberalism»¹⁹, even if Paraguay and Uruguay became observer members of Alba²⁰ and stand on the borders of what we could define as Venezuelan-inspired-socialism and Brazilian-inspired-socialism. Peru deserves some more attention: as previously said, in 2006 it turned to the left, with Alan Garcia becoming President again with the support of the centre-left American Popular Revolutionary Alliance. Garcia's government had various rows with Venezuela, but enjoyed good relations with Brazil and Chile. Peru however reverted to Alba in 2011, with Ollanta Humala becoming President, supported by the socialist anti-imperialist Peruvian Nationalist Party (the party he founded in 2005 and that brought him to a run-off with Garcia in 2006). We should also briefly focus on Honduras, where Manuel Zelaya, candidate for the centre-left Liberal Party, won the general elections in 2005; despite being regarded as a quite conservative politician, once elected he turned Chavist and allied with Alba. In 2009 he was overthrown by the Armed Forces, which installed Roberto Micheletti: the *golpe* was condemned by all the international community, including Us and Colombia. In 2009 presidential elections the conservative Porfirio Lobo Sosa, who was President from 2002 to 2005, came back to power. However, because of several improprieties occurred during the elections Alba countries refused to recognize the outcome of them, while China and Russia abstained from any comment.

The political reorientation of the continent did not pass unobserved in Russia and, already in 2005, while attending the Dialog between civilization forum, Russian Ambassador to Cuba, Andrei Dimitriev, stated «[Russia] is for taking collective measures that would make the process of globalization more manageable and, hence, fairer. Moscow notes with interest the reinvigoration of integration processes in Latin America and is ready for cooperation with countries in the region»²¹.

Trade agreements between these States and Russia concerned chiefly three commodities: weaponry, oil and nuclear energy, plus other economic agreements specific to each State. Ironically, we could say that Us itself pushed Latin

¹⁷ Also three little Caribbean islands joined Alba: Dominica in 2008, while Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Vincent in 2009.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ Also Haiti, Grenada and Syria became observer members of Alba.

²¹ Staff Writers, *Russia for fairer globalization*, «Ria Novosti», March 28, 2005, <http://en.rian.ru/onlinenews/20050328/39700660.html>.

American States into Russia's arms. In 2006²² the Us, followed by the Eu, imposed arms embargo against Venezuela which blocked any possible agreement with Us-European companies and opened the way to Russian and Chinese ones. The same year, after the Sandinista Manuel Ortega return to power, the refusal to grant Nicaragua a \$62 million loan already promised, followed once more by the Eu, which was supposed to grant a loan as well, pushed Venezuela to offer immediately a \$50 million dollar loan and Nicaragua to increase its economic ties with Moscow²³.

Certainly the biggest Russia's partner in military trade in Latin America is by now Venezuela. «Between 2005 and 2007 Russia signed 12 contracts worth more than \$4.4 billion to supply arms to Venezuela including fighter jets, helicopters and Kalashnikov assault rifles»²⁴. On September 9, 2009 Chavez signed a \$500 million worth contract for «purchasing at least 100 main battle tanks»²⁵, both T-72 and last-generation T-90, plus a \$1.5 billion one for the delivery of S-300 anti-aircraft systems²⁶. Moreover, the resources for this expansive purchase have been initially provided by Russia itself, which opened a line of credit to Venezuela²⁷. The guarantee to this generosity might have been the fact that exactly in September 2009 Venezuela announced the discovery a 7-8 trillion cubic feet natural gas deposit off its coasts²⁸.

Many other States took advantage of Russian defense industry's involvement in Latin America: the Kremlin signed weaponry trade agreements with Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Cuba, Peru and, to a lesser degree, with Uruguay, Guatemala, Argentina, Mexico and Colombia. Mexico and Colombia, which remain the only stable Us allies in the region, represent a minor exception, also for the very small volume of weaponry traded.

Brazil, among all other States, represents the biggest opportunity for Russia's arms trade; as noted by John C. K. Daly in 2008 «Russia's interest in military sales to Brazil, while currently modest, has the potential to take advantage of Washington's policy missteps, from a reluctance to share military technology to deploying military operations in areas that historically have well founded fears about American intentions»²⁹. At that time Russia sold to Brazil

²² Staff Writers, *United States announces Venezuela arms embargo, additional export restrictions possible*, Gibson Dunn, Jun 8, 2006, <http://www.gibsondunn.com/publications/Pages/UnitedStatesAnnouncesVenezuelaArmsEmbargoAdditionalExportRestrictionsPossible.aspx>. Staff Writers, *EEUU decreta un embargo de armas contra Venezuela*, WebIslam, May 17, 2006, http://www.webislam.com/noticias/46355-eeuu-decreta_un_embargo_de_armas_contra_venezuela.html.

²³ Staff Writers, *Freezing out farmers: the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the use of foreign aid as a political tool in Nicaragua*, Witness for Peace, 2006, http://witnessforpeace.org/downloads/Nica_March09_update.pdf.

²⁴ Staff Writers, *Venezuela to sign deal for 100 Russian tanks*, «Ria Novosti», September 09, 2009, http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20090909/156068044.html.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Staff Writers, *Hugo Chavez in \$2bn Russian arms deal*, Bbc News, September 14, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8253822.stm>.

²⁷ Staff Writing, *Venezuela buys \$2bn of Russian tanks, rockets... and more?*, «Defense Industry Daily», September, 22 2009, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/Venezuela-Buys-2B-of-Russian-Tanks-Rockets-05800/>.

²⁸ Staff Writing, *Venezuela finds vast gas reserve*, Bbc News, September 12, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8251981.stm>.

²⁹ John C. K. Daly, *Brazilian and Russian military cooperation deepens*, Jamestown Foundation, «Eurasia Daily Monitor», Volume 5, Issue 224, November 21, 2008, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=34156&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=166&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34156&tx_ttnews[backPid]=166&no_cache=1).

mainly helicopters and started a joint production of police armored cars, but what was said in 2008 seems to become true today, as new Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff cancelled a previously set tender for «the purchase of 36 combat aircraft which includes an agreement on production of another 84 planes under license»³⁰. The tender was launched in 1999 but was soon stopped because of Brazil's economic difficulties; later on, it was re-launched but with an incredible increase of the sum the Brazilian government would have been ready to pay to the winner from \$700 million of 1999 to the current \$6-\$10 billion. American and Russian companies retired and the European ones, united in consortium, appeared to be the winners of such a lucrative contest. But, as we said, the tender was again cancelled, maybe «due to the European fighters' exorbitant prices»³¹. The game is now open again, and there are increasing rumors that Russia could try to play its jolly, the Sukhoi Pak Fa (its 5th generation fighter project, not by chance under current joint development with India), maybe proposing Brazil to join the project³².

Russia itself is far from hiding its growing interest for Latin American's weaponry market, as «Rosoboronexport» writes: «The Latin American market has accounted for about two percent of Russian defense-related product exports in the past few years. This fact proves great prospects and a significant potential of military technical cooperation between Russia and Latin American States»³³.

About nuclear energy several agreements have been reached between Russia and Latin American States.

Venezuela and Russia started in 2008 to discuss the possibility of cooperating in the sphere of nuclear energy and on October 15, 2010 Medvedev signed a plan with Chavez for the construction of a nuclear plant.

On August 21, 2009 «Ecuador's Energy Minister has announced that Quito has signed an agreement with Moscow to develop nuclear energy "with solely peaceful purposes"»³⁴.

Regarding Argentina, on April 15, 2010, during an official visit to Buenos Aires, Medvedev stated that «Moscow aims to spend billions of dollars to help Argentina develop its civilian nuclear energy program»³⁵; during the same visit «at least 10 bilateral documents were signed between the two leaders»³⁶.

On July 21, 2009 Russia and Brazil signed a memorandum about the «development of uranium prospecting technology and the design of new reactors,

³⁰ Ilya Kramnik, *Russia to offer fifth-generation prototype fighter to Brazil?*, «Ria Novosti», January 28, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20110128/162357069.html>.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² Staff Writers, *Brazil's F-X2 fighter competition*, «Defense Industry Daily», September 30, 2011, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/brazil-embarking-upon-f-x2-fighter-program-04179/>.

³³ Staff Writers, *New offers for Latin America*, «Rosoboronexport», April 11, 2011, http://www.roe.ru/news/pr_rel/pr_rel_eng/pr_eng_11_04_11.html.

³⁴ Staff Writers, *Ecuador, Russia sign nuclear energy agreement*, Afp/Pti, August 21, 2009, <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/ecuador-russia-sign-nuclear-energy-agreement/71341/on>.

³⁵ Staff Writers, *Russia, Argentina talk nuclear energy*, Upi, April 15, 2010, http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Energy-Resources/2010/04/15/Russia-Argentina-talk-nuclear-energy/UPI-82821271340857/.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

as well as the design and construction of nuclear research reactors»³⁷, while in October 2008, Russian nuclear holding Rosatom already offered «assistance with uranium exploration to Brazil»³⁸.

Finally, Bolivia officially declared on October 30, 2010 that it planned to build a nuclear plant with Iran's help; given the fact that a big part of Iran's nuclear technology comes from Russia and that Bolivia's cooperation with the Islamic Republic could hardly be implemented, it is possible to foresee a future involvement of Russia itself.

Starting from 2007 Russia signed a series of key agreements on oil with Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba.

In 2007 «Gazprom and Brazilian oil company Petrobras [...] signed an agreement on hydrocarbon cooperation»³⁹, the year after the Russian giant «approved opening a representative office in Rio de Janeiro in late 2008»⁴⁰ and on May 14, 2010, together with Stroytransgaz «agreed strategic cooperation with their Brazilian partners»⁴¹.

On February 16, 2009 Russia and Bolivia «signed an agreement on energy cooperation, which paved the way for Gazprom [...] to be involved in Bolivia's natural gas industry»⁴² [and to form, along] with the Bolivian State oil and gas company Yfbp, [...] a major joint venture to develop Bolivia's huge natural gas reserves»⁴⁴.

Soon after, in April 2009, «Cuba and Russia signed an agreement to allow Russian State oil company Zarubezhneft to explore for and produce oil in Cuba in the first post-Soviet oil pact»⁴⁴. Together with the agreement came also a generous credit of «\$150 million [...] for construction materials and farm machinery»⁴⁵. In the same month «Gazprom revealed plans to acquire a 20-24.5% stake in Petroandina, a joint venture between the national oil companies of Bolivia and Venezuela, which aims to broaden Bolivia's areas of gas production»⁴⁶.

During the summer, on July 29, 2009, Russia and Nicaragua agreed on oil «exploration, both in land and Nicaraguan waters [to] be carried out by the

³⁷ Staff Writers, *Russia, Brazil to cooperate on nuclear power*, «Latin American Herald Tribune», July 21 2009, <http://www.laht.com/article.asp?ArticleId=339701&CategoryId=14090>.

³⁸ Staff Writers, *Rosatom offers Brazil assistance with uranium exploration*, «Ria Novosti», October 31, 2008, <http://www.wise-uranium.org/upsam.html>.

³⁹ Staff Writers, *Gazprom, Brazil's Petrobras sign agreement on oil and gas*, «Ria Novosti», February 26, 2007, <http://en.rian.ru/business/20070226/61247786.html>.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ Staff Writers, *Gazprom, Stroytransgaz agree cooperation with Brazil*, Interfax, May 12, 2010, http://www.stroytransgaz.com/press-center/smi/interfax/14_05_2010.

⁴² Staff Writers, *Bolivia, Russia agree on energy, military, anti-drug cooperation*, «People's Daily Online», February 17, 2009, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90852/6594482.html>.

⁴³ William F. Engdahl, *Russia, Bolivia to launch gas joint venture*, Strategic Culture Foundation, October 26, 2009, <http://www.strategic-culture.org/pview/2009/10/26/6330.html>.

⁴⁴ Staff Writers, *Cuba and Russia sign first post-Soviet oil deal*, France 24 Int News, November 04, 2009, <http://www.france24.com/en/20091104-cuba-russia-sign-first-post-soviet-oil-deal>.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ Staff Writers, *Gazprom ready to join Andean Noc Club*, Oil and Gas Insight, April, 2009, <http://www.oilandgasinsight.com/file/98940/gazprom-ready-to-join-andean-noc-club.html>.

National Petroleum Consortium of Russia»⁴⁷. On September 15, 2009, an agreement between Moscow and Caracas was signed, stating that «Venezuela and a consortium of Russian oil companies intend to invest \$20 billion into the development of the Junin 6 oil deposit in the Orinoco River Basin [...]»⁴⁸. During another meeting on April 1, 2010 the two Presidents agreed on giving «PdVsa [Venezuelan State-owned oil company] a 60%-stake in the joint venture, with the rest owned by the Russian consortium»⁴⁹.

At the end of 2009, on October 9, Gazprom stated its interest in «investing in Argentina, in all segments of the gas production (extraction, transport and distribution)»⁵⁰. The previous year a meeting with Lukoil took place and it is important also to acknowledge Russia's interest for Argentina's pipelines.

Russia and its Latin American partners as political allies on the international arena

In this section we deal with what we called the «evolution of some contacts into solid political alliances». We mainly focus on the cases of Venezuela and Brazil, also pointing out remarkable events regarding other Latin American States.

From a political point of view, the crucial element which unites Russia with its Central-South American partners is the call for a multi-polar world: for example, in September 2008, Putin said in Caracas that «Latin America is becoming a noticeable link in the chain of the multi-polar world that is forming»⁵¹. The unmentioned third party against which this concept is opposed is of course the Us. Moreover, Russia stands along with the Latin American States calling for the end of Us' embargo against Cuba and defending their sovereignty: for example, in December 2008, Medvedev and Ortega «in a joint statement [...] made a call to stand up against external pressures against Nicaragua»⁵². Latin American States reciprocated siding with Russia's positions on a topic not directly involving them in any way: in December 2009, Medvedev and Bolivian President Evo Morales jointly «expressed their concern over the Us missile defense plan in Europe and Nato's ongoing eastward expansion, which contradicted the goals of peace and security»⁵³.

Regarding Nato expansion in Eastern Europe and Us' missile shield plans, as we reported before, Latin American leaders repeatedly expressed their solidarity

⁴⁷ Staff Writers, *Russia will explore oil in Nicaragua*, Mipunto, July 29, 2009, http://staging-cadata-trunk.centralamericaadmin.com/en/article/home/Russia_Will_Explore_Oil_in_Nicaragua.

⁴⁸ Staff Writers, *Russia, Venezuela to invest \$20 billion in Junin 6 oil field*, «Ria Novosti», September 15, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/business/20090915/156128402.html>.

⁴⁹ Staff Writers, *Russia, Venezuela sign deal to jointly develop Junin 6 oil field*, «Ria Novosti», April 01, 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20100401/158388988.html>.

⁵⁰ Staff Writers, *La petrolera rusa Gazprom analiza invertir en Argentina*, Clarín, October 9, 2009 http://www.ieco.clarin.com/empresas/Argentina-Gazprom-petrolera-invertir-analiza_0_131386868.html.

⁵¹ The Associated Press, *Vladimir Putin, Hugo Chavez plug 'multi-polar world'*, «NYDailyNews», September 25, 2008 <http://www.nydailynews.com/latino/Vladimir-Putin-Hugo-Chavez-plug-multi-polar-world-article-1.321561>.

⁵² Wang Hongjiang, *Nicaragua, Russia sign cooperation agreement*, «Xinhua», December 19, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/19/content_10527434.htm.

⁵³ Xuequan, Mu., *Russia, Bolivia sign military, anti-drug co-op deals*, «Xinhua», February 16, 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-02/16/content_10830051.htm.

to Moscow. The same happened regarding Russia's intervention in Georgia: no Latin American State having military-economic relations with the Kremlin condemned Russia's actions. Argentinian and Brazilian Presidents, among others, limited their statement to a general call to end the violence and to a peaceful settlement of the crisis (given their will not to damage severely their relations with the Us), while Chavez took a radical position, followed by all Alba member States. He described the war as an «unacceptable act of violence perpetrated by the Georgian troops against the South Ossetian population [...] planned, set and ordered by the United States government»⁵⁴. Moreover, less than two weeks after Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence, Nicaragua did the same, followed one year after by Venezuela⁵⁵. No other Russian ally had yet gone so far.

But Latin American solidarity with Russia did not remain confined to verbal declarations. On September 10, 2008 two Russian Tu-160 strategic bombers landed in Venezuela and, during their six days visit, a joint military exercise was held with Venezuela's Air Force (Cold War-style patrol flights of Russian nuclear bombers were restored by Putin on August 17, 2007, as a part of Russian response to Us missile shield plan)⁵⁶. Shortly after, on November 26, a naval task force of the Russian Northern Fleet, after a tour in the Mediterranean Sea and exercises in the Atlantic Ocean, arrived in the Venezuelan bay of La Guaira and, once again, joined the Venezuela Navy for military manoeuvres. Before leaving for the Indian Ocean, the Russian warships headed to Nicaragua and, in a very symbolic move, to Cuba. It was the first time since the Cold War that the Russian Navy returned to the Caribbean Sea and held military drills⁵⁷.

Venezuela's support for Russia culminated in March 2009, when, as reported by Chief of the Long-Range Aviation Staff, Maj-Gen. Anatoly Zhikharev: «Chavez proposed to us a whole island with an airfield that we can use for temporary basing of strategic bombers»⁵⁸. In July 2008, right before Russian Tu-160 took off for Venezuela, Gen. of the Army Pyotr Deinekin suggested that Russia could place its bombers in Cuba, stating that «if these plans are being considered, it would be a good response to the attempts to place Nato bases near the Russian borders; I do not see anything wrong with it because nobody listens to our objections when they place airbases and electronic monitoring and surveillance stations near our borders»⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ Staff Writers, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with regard to the situation in South Ossetia*, Consulate General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in San Francisco/Usa, August 14, 2008, <http://venezuela-us.org/2008/08/15/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-bolivarian-republic-of-venezuela-with-regard-to-the-situation-in-south-ossetia/>.

⁵⁵ Nauru, the 21 square kilometers world's smallest island-nation, also recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent States.

⁵⁶ Staff Writers, *Strategic bombers patrol Caribbean*, «Ria Novosti», September 15, 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080915/116792825.html>.

⁵⁷ Staff Writers, *Russian Navy to show its flags in the Caribbean Sea*, «Ria Novosti», November 26, 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20081126/118550848.html>.

⁵⁸ Staff Writers, *Hugo Chavez open to Russian strategic bombers using Venezuelan island*, «Ria Novosti», March 14, 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090314/120562301.html>.

⁵⁹ Staff Writers, *Russia needs bombers in Cuba due to Nato expansion – ex-commander*, «Ria Novosti», July 21, 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080721/114527149.html>.

The generous proposal of Chavez was very kindly declined, together with similar ones advanced by Belarus, Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (Pmr), Syria and Libya: the first three nations declared themselves ready to host Russian missiles; moreover Russian Navy officers declared that the decision for developing into a fully operational naval base the already existing Russian naval facilities in Tartus, Syria was taken⁶⁰, and Col. Muammar Gaddafi officially offered to the Kremlin the use of Libyan coasts to build a new naval base (ironically, Benghazi was taken into consideration as possible location). Further rumors regarded also a possible Russian naval base to be installed in Yemen, the country which unified former Soviet Cold War ally South Yemen and Cold War adversary North Yemen⁶¹.

Brazil did not follow Venezuela in its hard-lined position, but shortly after another key event proved how its political views stuck to Russia's ones.

On June 12, 2009 Iran held its presidential elections, which resulted in incumbent President Ahmadinejad's victory, followed by accusations of frauds by the opposition, mass anti-governmental demonstrations and violent repression. The international community divided itself into States which doubted about the legality of the elections and, to various extents, backed the protesters, and States which congratulated Ahmadinejad for his victory. Among the last ones: Russia and all the members of Collective Security Treaty Organization (Csto), China, different Arab States, all Alba member States and Brazil. Lula himself said «Iran is not the first country where there are protests after elections. It seems that President Ahmadinejad won with 61% or 62%, it's a huge assumption to think there was fraud; I think it's impossible to manipulate 30% of the votes. Those protests are an expression of those who lost. I myself have been at these kinds of protests [when defeated in the presidential elections previous to his victory in 2003]»⁶².

Sovereignty, legitimacy of State power and non-interference in internal affairs are key issues both for Russia and China, and Brazil's firm support to these stances during the Iranian affair has showed how commonly shared are the political views, which are becoming the core of Brics.

We should now briefly linger over Brics. The term Bric appeared for the first time in a Goldman Sachs paper published on November 30, 2001 and titled *Building better global economic Brics*. In 2003 Goldman Sachs released another

⁶⁰ The intention «to modernize the facility [of Tartus] to accommodate large warships, including missile cruisers and even aircraft carriers» has been reconfirmed in 2012, as a Russian naval taskforce paid a strategic visit in Syria [Staff Writers, *Russian warships leave Syrian port of Tartus*, «Ria Novosti», January 10, 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20120110/170695026.html>].

⁶¹ Staff Writers, *Syria: we'll host Russian missile system*, Russia Today, August 21, 2008, <http://rt.com/news/syria-well-host-russian-missile-system/>. Staff, Writers, *Transnistria welcomes Russian missiles*, «Presseurop», February 16, 2011, <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/news-brief-cover/191551-transnistria-welcomes-russian-missiles>. Staff Writers, *Russia warns of Belarus missiles*, Bbc News, November 14, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7094347.stm>. Staff Writers, *Russia plans navy bases in Libya, Syria and Yemen: report*, Abc News, January 16, 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/01/16/2468180.htm>.

⁶² Marcela Canavarro, *Brazil supports Iranian election result*, «The Rio Times», June 23, 2009, <http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/rio-politics/brazil-supports-iranian-election-results/>.

paper, titled *Dreaming with Brics: the path to 2050*, where Bric's dream meant «that these countries together could overtake the combined Gdp of the G7 by 2035»⁶³. Other Goldman Sachs publications followed in 2004 and in 2007 in *Brics and beyond* it was stated that Bric's combined Gdps in 2050 could rise up to \$128,324 dollar, while the G7's ones would be stuck at less than half (\$66,039 dollar).

For years the acronym Bric remained mostly a way to refer to emerging powerful economies (with many questioning since the start Russia's participation into the group⁶⁴). However, in September 2006, the leaders of these four nations met in New York and gave the onset to a series of encounters, culminating into the first Bric official meeting held in Yekaterinburg on May 16, 2008. Approximately one year after, on June 16, 2009, the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India and China met again in Yekaterinburg for the first official Bric Summit. Many topics were discussed, among them: the necessity of more coordination between Bric's founding members, the state of global economy and the necessity to reform international financial institutions. The Russian side particularly marked the non-Western character of Bric, which was defined by Co-chairman of the Eu-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee Andrey Klimov as a «completely new [...] platform [which] unites four such diverse countries as Brazil, Russia, India and China; these States do not belong to what is known as Western civilization [and] each of them is a large sovereign State [which] will carry the greatest responsibility for the development of humanity in the XXI century»⁶⁵. A second Bric Summit was held in 2010 in Brasilia, while a third in China (where South Africa joined the group and the acronym was modified in Brics); 2012 will see India hosting the 4th Summit.

Finally, the International Monetary Fund (Imf) estimates that in 2011 Brics nations' combined Gdp Ppp amounted to \$21,025 billion and combined Gdp Nominal to \$13,654 billion (in both cases China's presence made the difference). In terms of population and area, the Brics countries represent nearly half of world's population (2,934,822,616 inhabitants over 6,981 billion estimated world population) and more than one fourth of world's land (39,739,375 km² over 148,940,000 km²)⁶⁶.

Coming back to Brazil, it is also important to acknowledge its crucial role as Brics member during the 2011 Un-backed Western intervention in Libya, which established a no-fly-zone, but gave at the same time to the intervening States the

⁶³ Dominic Wilson, Roopa Purushothaman, *Global economics paper No: 9 - Dreaming with Brics: the path to 2050*, October 1, 2003, p. 2, <http://www2.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/brics/brics-reports-pdfs/brics-dream.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Åslund Anders already in December 2009 asked the rhetorical question «what on Earth is Russia doing on the list of top emerging economies?»; the point of the author was that «[Russia's] economic performance has plummeted to such a dismal level that one must ask whether it is entitled to have any say at all on the global economy, compared with the other, more functional members of its cohort». Åslund Anders, *Take the R out of Bric*, «Foreign Policy», December 2, 2009, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/02/kick_russia_out_of_bric.

⁶⁵ Staff Writers, *Bric is not just another platform of the Western civilization*, «Ria Novosti», April 15, 2010, http://en.rian.ru/valdai_op/20100415/158590183.html.

⁶⁶ Staff Writers, *5. Report for selected countries and subjects*, Imf, September 2011, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2009&ey=2016&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=223%2C924%2C922%2C199%2C534&s=NGDPD%2CNGDPDPC%2CPPPGDP%2CPPPPC&grp=0&a=&pr.x=101&pr.y=17>.

quite vague requirement «to take all necessary measures [...] to protect civilians»⁶⁷. China and Russia let the Un resolution be approved, abstaining in the Security Council, but immediately criticized the military intervention. However the new and crucial element is that their position was nearly immediately backed by emerging international powers like India and Brazil and by South Africa as well, not by chance Brics members.

Moreover, the initial single positions soon merged into a unified Brics' one, which was coordinated at the summit of Sanya, in China. For the first time Brics nations took a common position, directly opposed to the West's one. In the common declaration which was signed, the five leaders declared: «We are of the view that all the parties should resolve their differences through peaceful means and dialogue in which the Un and regional organizations should as appropriate play their role. We share the principle that the use of force should be avoided. We maintain that the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of each nation should be respected»⁶⁸.

Russia's involvement in Libya proceeded further on. On May 24, 2011 the Kremlin recognized «Libya's Transitional National Council [the Libyan rebels] as a legitimate negotiator on Libya's future, [but not] as the only legitimate representative of the Libyan people»⁶⁹. Just three days after at the G8 summit in Deauville, France, Medvedev said «that Russia could act as a mediator to solve Libya's domestic crisis, but Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has no right to lead the country any longer»⁷⁰. Russia effectively tried to mediate through Tunisia, but Libya refused a few days later. Although the position of Russian leadership was compact blaming Western military intervention in Libya, different tones were used: Putin compared the Un resolution to «medieval calls for crusades»⁷¹, while Medvedev strongly rejected this statement, defining it «inadmissible»⁷². Following the brutal killing of Gaddafi and the demise of the Jamahiriya, the reactions of Brics countries were slightly different: China, India, Brazil and South Africa did not celebrate Gaddafi's death and called for a peaceful solution of the Libyan crisis, while the Kremlin released far stronger statements. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said that Gaddafi killing breached the Geneva Conventions, while Putin more polemically said: «nearly all Gaddafi's family was killed, his corps was shown by all Tv channels around the world; it was impossible to watch without disgust». More recently, answering to a provocation by Us Senator Mc Cain, who warned Putin of a possible Libyan scenario in Russia, the Russian Prime Minister

⁶⁷ Staff Writers, *Un security council resolution 1973 (2011) on Libya – full text*, «The Guardian», March 17, 2011.

⁶⁸ Staff Writers, *Brics nations against use of force in Libya*, «The China Post», April 15, 2011, <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/international/africa/2011/04/15/298706/BRICS-nations.htm>.

⁶⁹ Staff Writers, *Russia recognizes Libyan rebels as legitimate negotiators*, «Ria Novosti», May 24, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110524/164197576.html>.

⁷⁰ Staff Writers, *Libyan gov't doubts Russia's turnaround stance over conflict*, «Xinhua», May 27, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-05/28/c_13898643.htm.

⁷¹ Staff Writers, *Vladimir Putin likens Un Libya resolution to crusade call*, «Ria Novosti», March 21, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110321/163126957.html>.

⁷² Staff Writers, *Dimitri Medvedev says comparing Un resolution on Libya with 'medieval crusade call' inadmissible*, «Ria Novosti», March 21, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20110321/163129484.html>.

called again Gaddafi's killing «disgusting and terrible»⁷³; Putin also directly accused the Us to be involved in Gaddafi's death⁷⁴. Belorussian President said that Nato behaved worst than Nazi in Libya, while Chavez⁷⁵ said Venezuela «will remember Gaddafi forever as a great fighter, a revolutionary and a martyr»⁷⁶.

The crisis in the Arab world is far from being over and after Libya Brics' attention has moved to Syria, where protests are currently cracked down by the government. Russia and China already showed their unwillingness to let Syria follow the Libyan example as «an European push for the Un Security Council to condemn Syria's violent crackdown on anti-government protesters was blocked on Wednesday [April 27, 2011] by resistance from Russia, China and Lebanon»⁷⁷.

Usa and Eu took their own way, proceeding with a very strong condemnation of Syria's leadership actions. However Us Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, aware of the importance of the Brics for Syria, «urged China, India and Russia to step up pressure on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to curtail his government's brutal crackdown on protests»⁷⁸ on August 11, 2011. This call did not succeed as all Brics repeated to be against of any «foreign interference in Syria»⁷⁹.

Furthermore, the same day when Us and Eu's leaders called for Assad to step down, on August 19, 2011, Russian Foreign Ministry immediately affirmed: «we do not support such calls and believe that it is necessary now to give President Assad's regime time to realize all the reform processes that have been announced»⁸⁰. Few days after the Ibsa Group (India, Brazil, South Africa) expressed the opinion that «the Syrian issue is best resolved by the Syrians themselves and they must be given space to do so [and that] the Syrian government has indicated that it has been and continues to take reforms to open up the political space»⁸¹.

Brics position has cemented once more in opposition to the West at the beginning of October 2011, when Russia and China vetoed a Un Security Council resolution which threatened sanctions against Syria and the Indian representative abstained. He stated that the resolution «does not condemn the violence

⁷³ Staff Writers, *Vladimir Putin calls Gaddafi's killing 'disgusting'*, «Voice of Russia», December 15, 2011, <http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/12/15/62268689.html>.

⁷⁴ He then accused Mc Cain of having had a part in Us killings of civilians during the Vietnam War and added that «he [Mc Cain] was captured and spent several years in a pit; anyone would have had mental problems after that».

⁷⁵ Staff Writers, *Chávez: Gaddafi will be remembered as a martyr*, «El Universal», October 20 2011, <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/111020/Hugo-Chavez-gaddafi-will-be-remembered-as-a-martyr>.

⁷⁶ Regarding such type of declarations, Vladimir Zhirinovsky defined Gaddafi «an African Karl Marx, a Libyan [Giuseppe] Garibaldi». The Duma factions of Cprf, Ldpr and Just Russia unanimously called for the Duma to approve a statement of condolences for Gaddafi's death, however the proposal was rejected by United Russia Mps. [Staff Writers, *Gaddafi's death 'landmark' for Libya, Western leaders say*, «Ria Novosti», October 20, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/news/20111020/167911895.html>].

⁷⁷ Louis Charbonneau, Patrick Worsnip, *European push for Un condemnation of Syria fails*, Reuters, April 27, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/28/us-syria-un-idUSTRE73Q89J20110428>.

⁷⁸ Staff Writers, *Us urges China, Russia, India action on Syria*, «Space War», August 11, 2011, http://www.spacewar.com/reports/US_urges_China_Russia_India_action_on_Syria_999.html.

⁷⁹ H. Sabbagh, M. Ismael., *Russia reiterates rejection of foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs*, Sana, July 31, 2011, <http://www.sana.sy/eng/337/2011/07/31/361334.htm>.

⁸⁰ Alissa De Carbonnel, *Russia opposes Western calls for Syria's Assad to go*, Reuters, August 19, 2011, <http://fin.reuters.com/article/2011/08/19/idINIndia-58868120110819>.

⁸¹ Terna Gyuse, *Ibsa Opposes Measures Against Syria*, Ips, August 22, 2011, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=104851>.

perpetrated by the Syrian opposition. Nor does it place any responsibility on the opposition to abjure violence and engage with the Syrian authorities for redressal of their grievances through a peaceful political process»⁸².

After the peace plan, proposed by the Arab League and accepted by Damascus in November 2011, failed to stop the violence, Russia and China came stronger to urge Assad to implement reform plans that could stop the violence (however maintaining their complete refuse to any type of sanctions against Damascus). Furthermore, Russia proposed on December 18, 2011 a «surprise resolution»⁸³ on Syria at the Un Security Council, demanding that «all parties in Syria immediately stop any violence irrespective of where it comes from»⁸⁴, meeting India's approval (as, «along with other Bric nations, India has come to the conclusion that the unrest in Syria is being exploited by different interests; for instance, officials tracking Syria note that the violence is now most concentrated in Homs, which is the headquarters for the Muslim Brotherhood»⁸⁵). Nearly at the same time President Assad signed a deal with the Arab League allowing a fact-finding mission of the League to enter Syria.

Comparative perspective: Us, China and the Eu in Latin America

Before drawing the conclusions of this analysis we believe it is important to briefly report on the level of influence in Central-South America of three other global players: Us, China and the Eu. The comparison with Russia's military, economic and political influence in Latin America will furthermore support our thesis.

Starting with military presence and cooperation, we can see how the Us finds itself in troubled waters. Washington's military coordinating structure for Central-South America is the Southern Command, which was located in Panama from 1963 to 1977 (even if American military presence in Panama dated back to 1903). When in 1999 Us troops moved out from Panama, they relocated in Puerto Rico, just to meet a very powerful mass movement which in 2004 succeeded in making American troops leave the country. The various Headquarters (Hq) of the Army and Navy were relocated in Texas and Florida, while Ecuador, El Salvador, Aruba and Curaçao saw the arrival of Us troops, officially to counter drug smuggling. However, the American base in Ecuador (located in Manta) was closed in 2009, after foreign military presence was outlawed in the country. The operating base in Comalapa, El Salvador, is still open, but with increasing popular discontent and calls for closure. Deals for Aruba and Curaçao, former Dutch colonies, with Dutch Queen Beatrix still heading a constitutional Monarchy, were facilitated by Netherlands' membership of Nato and seem to be more stable. The most important Us move in the continent was however attempted in 2009, when

⁸² Staff Writers, *India abstains from Unsc vote on Syria*, News Bulletin, October 05, 2011, <http://www.newsbulletin/world/52-more/19070-india-abstains-from-uncsc-vote-on-syria>.

⁸³ Staff Writers, *Russia proposes surprise Syria resolution*, «Ria Novosti», December 16, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20111216/170296786.html>.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ Bagchi Indrani, *India may back Russian Un resolution on Syria*, «Times of India», December 17, 2011, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-12-17/india/30528363_1_president-assad-free-syrian-army-defector-group.

President Obama signed a deal with Colombia for the usufruct of seven military bases⁸⁶; the deal was signed, but declared illegal by the Colombian Constitutional Court in 2010, so the Us saw a potentially massive increase of its military presence directly in the heart of Alba falling through. Following this major blow, American forces together with Colombian ones returned to Panama, with anti-illegal immigration purposes. Finally, the Us are also in control of the Guantanamo Base in Cuba and of a Naval Support Detachment in Sao Paulo, Brazil⁸⁷.

Regarding China and Eu member countries, none of them has military presence in Central-South America (if we exclude British Overseas Territories, French Département d'Outre-Mer and former Dutch Nederlandse Antillen).

Proceeding with arms trade, we can see how the Us played a fundamental role in supplying what still remains the bulk of armies like the Brazilian, Chilean or Argentinian ones. However, while the Us for 2011 classify first arms exporter, its flux of weapons is directed towards other areas, like the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, South Asia and Oceania. European countries participated and still participate providing weapons to most of South American countries. The crucial element however is that while weapon's purchase becomes more and more a political act, Us and Eu get less and less attractive if compared to Russia, which proved to be a very reliable seller and whose share in world's military trade continues to grow. Finally, China signed a series of deals, mostly with Alba countries, but being one of the most important importer of Russian weapons, its attractiveness cannot be compared with Moscow⁸⁸.

Coming to economic influence, we could briefly analyze the fluctuations in terms of import-export regarding Eu, Us and China. According to World Bank's World Integrated Trade System⁸⁹, we see how the Us and leading Eu countries singularly taken since 1988 enjoyed a trade flow to most of the continent between \$332 million and \$3,8 billion, while China in 1988 had only one appreciable partnership, with Brazil. In twenty years China equaled Us and Eu levels, proceeding towards a possible overtaking. A major example of Us difficulties in the continent was the failure of Ftaa (Free Trade Area of the Americas), which should have concretized an expansion of Nafta (North American Free Trade Agreement).

Finally, concluding with political issues, we have already discussed the reasons of Us decreasing influence in Latin America, up to present time: «For a President [Obama] who has clearly established that foreign policy is not something that gets him up in the morning (or appears to keep him awake at night), Latin America must rank just above Antarctica in descending areas of interest»⁹⁰. Concerning the Eu the

⁸⁶ Us and Colombia are strongly military linked by the over-decennial anti-drug-trafficking Plan Colombia, which provided Bogota with huge economic founding, mainly directed to the military sphere.

⁸⁷ John Lindsay-Poland, *Us military bases in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Global Policy Forum, August 2004, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/153/26157.html>.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ World Integrated Trade System, World Bank, <http://devdata.worldbank.org/TradeMapVisualizer/DataVisualizer.html>.

⁹⁰ José R. Cárdenas, *The Us is Mia in Latin America*, «Foreign Policy», December 29, 2011, http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/12/29/the_us_is_mia_in_latam_america.

role of Spain deserves some attention: due to its strong linguistic and cultural links, Spain always played a privileged role in economic and political contacts with Latin America. Europe and Latin America structured their contacts in the Eu-Lac Strategic Partnership; common goals are «cooperation against drugs, and in particular trafficking, and support for intelligence and information-sharing with judicial institutions in the region, and between the Eu and Latin American and Caribbean authorities»⁹¹. Finally, China's political influence in South America is clearly exercised through rising economic interconnection, but also through the channels opened by the establishment of Brics and by the fact that the political views, uniting Alba countries with Moscow, are widely shared by Beijing.

Conclusions

As a conclusive statement we affirm that Russia successfully implemented an ongoing process aimed at repositioning itself on the international arena as a major super-power, with a resurrected global web of alliances. To recognize the real weight of the change occurred during the last ten years we just have to look back at Russia's condition at the beginning of the millennium. At that time it would have been very hard to think that in such a small period Russia would have been able to secure most of the former Ssrs in a Kremlin headed security organization (Csto), to develop a high-level partnership with India and China at Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Sco), to promote a deep economic integration with two key former Ssr (Customs Union), to penetrate formerly Us dominated Latin America and to be one of the leading promoters of Brics. Of course, these achievements need to be compared with the other side of the coin. Many problems of various types still affect the Russian Federation: Moscow has long-term economic problems related to modernization and needs to fight against endemic corruption. The Kremlin is experiencing serious political problems, with United Russia losing the absolute majority at the Duma and unprecedented tens of thousands nonviolent anti-Government demonstrations taking place in Moscow. Russia still enjoys the current Eastern Europe's frozen situation, for which it is directly responsible (because of its role in the unsolved frozen conflicts and in many issues regarding the former European Ssrs⁹²), but this situation itself cannot last forever; finally, the Csto proved to be largely ineffective during the Kyrgyz crisis in 2010⁹³, the Customs Union has been threatened by various skirmishes between Russia and Belarus⁹⁴ and China, despite all, represents an actual competitor for Russia and a potential future threat⁹⁵.

⁹¹ Staff Writers, *Latin America – Regional programming document 2007-2013*, European Commission, July 12, 2007, p. 22, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/la/rsp/07_13_en.pdf.

⁹² John Peet, *Frozen conflicts. Europe's unfinished business*, «The Economist», November 19, 2008, <http://www.economist.com/node/12494503>.

⁹³ Miriam Elder, *Kyrgyzstan tests Russia's regional commitments*, «Global Post», June 15, 2010, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/russia/100614/kyrgyzstan-ethnic-violence>.

⁹⁴ Staff Writers, *Russia-Belarus gas row leaves bitter aftertaste*, «EurActive», June 25, 2010, <http://www.euractiv.com/russia-belarus-gas-row-leaves-bitter-aftertaste-news-495592>.

⁹⁵ Robert Bridge, *China and Russia: allies of circumstance*, «Russia Today», October 14, 2009, <http://rt.com/politics/china-russia-allies-circumstance/>.

Concentrating on Latin America, we have shown how successful have been Russian actions in the region to improve Kremlin's involvement and the building of strong political partnerships. Even if the volume of economic trade cannot be compared to that enjoyed by Russia with other partners or other international actors⁹⁶, what we found important is that through economic contacts Russia managed to stipulate key alliances with emerging regional and international actors.

The aim of this operation, the way it has been carried out and its results support the thesis that Russia is back to the international arena as a strong, unavoidable global power.

⁹⁶ As shown in the following chart, Russia's main partners in terms of trade flows are not located in Latin America:

Trade flows between the Russian Federation and:	Amount in Million/Billion Dollars referred to the year 2008:
Argentina	740.20 M
Belarus	23.69 B
Brazil	2.04 B
China	20.34 B
France	7.17 B
Germany	19.62 B
India	4.48 B
Italy	32.11 B
Kazakhstan	12.87 B
Venezuela	183.88 M
Ukraine	22.54 B
Usa	11.88 B
United Kingdom	12.25 B

World Integrated Trade System, World Bank
<http://devdata.worldbank.org/TradeMapVisualizer/DataVisualizer.html>.

Istituto Italo-Latino Americano (Iila)

L'Istituto Italo-Latino Americano è un organismo internazionale con sede in Roma di cui fanno parte l'Italia e le venti Repubbliche latinoamericane. Fondato nel 1966 su iniziativa del senatore Amintore Fanfani, esso ha come obiettivo istituzionale il rafforzamento delle relazioni economiche, scientifiche, culturali e di cooperazione dei paesi latinoamericani con l'Italia e, tramite l'Italia, con l'Europa. Fra le tante iniziative, di particolare rilievo sono:

- l'organizzazione delle *Conferenze nazionali Italia - America Latina e Caraibi*;
- l'allestimento del padiglione dell'America Latina presso la Biennale di Venezia e la presenza alla manifestazione di Roma *Più libri, più liberi*;
- la pubblicazione di volumi dedicati all'approfondimento delle tematiche di carattere economico nell'ambito della *Collana di Studi latinoamericani*;
- l'organizzazione del *Corso di perfezionamento in Affari europei per diplomatici latinoamericani e per funzionari in servizio presso organizzazioni latinoamericane*, in collaborazione con il Centro internazionale di formazione dell'Oil di Torino e con il sostegno del Ministero degli Affari esteri, della Regione Piemonte e di altri Enti economici piemontesi;
- l'organizzazione del *Corso di alta formazione in Studi latinoamericani*, in collaborazione con gli Atenei di Roma Sapienza, Roma Tre e Tor Vergata e di altre Istituzioni italiane e straniere.



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