

Latin America faces Eurasian conflicts: assessing regional responses in the age of Russia — United States tensions

A. González Levaggi

Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina,
av. Alicia Moreau de Justo 1300 (C1107AAZ). C.A.B.A., Buenos Aires, Argentina

For citation: González Levaggi A. Latin America faces Eurasian conflicts: assessing regional responses in the age of Russia — United States tensions. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. International Relations*, 2019, vol. 12, issue 2, pp. 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu06.2019.206>

From the ‘August’ crisis in 2008 to the high-scale intervention in the Syrian Civil War there had been increasing tensions between Russia and West that changed the global geopolitical scenario. The bulk of the literature has focused mostly on the bilateral relations between the U.S. and the Russian Federation, and its strategic implications in conflictive regional orders such as the Post-Soviet Space, Middle East and the Black Sea region. By looking at the international impact of regional conflicts in Central Eurasia, this paper seeks to shed light on the strategic triangle in the Western Hemisphere which brings Latin America, next to Washington and Moscow. By using a systemic framework, this article argues that rising tension between US and Russia affects not only the strategic calculations of Latin American chancelleries but also the type of Moscow’s regional strategy which would be more prone to emphasize geopolitical over economic factors, affecting negatively the degree of Russian influence in the region. To assess these arguments, I present two types of empirical elements. On the one hand, I present data about UN General Assembly voting in the 1991–2015 period which shows that there had been a decline in the voting agreement between Latin America and Russia in the last decade, while the region has improved its engagement with the US. On the other hand, I analyze briefly how Argentina, Mexico and Brazil vote in the specific cases of the Georgian and Ukrainian conflicts at the UN General Assembly and UN Security Council.

Keywords: Russia, Latin America, New Cold War.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has been constrained in its relations with the world by two interlinked regional features, the existence of the United States (US) hegemony under the Western Hemisphere in which faces no imminent threats [1; 2, p. 10] and the asymmetry of military and economic capabilities between the US and the rest of the countries [3]. However, it does not mean neither that the hegemony operates absolutely, nor the asymmetry has blocked — sometimes successful — attempts to gain autonomy in world politics. For various reasons, LAC countries have sought ways to enhance their influence in the international arena, moving away from the structural hemispheric constraints while looking for global diversification in their foreign policy strategies. In the 2000s, there were hope about an ascending regional agency based on the role of Brazil as a global player and an agenda of autonomist collectivization in which the central concern was related with the preservation of autonomy vis-a-vis the US [4]. The arrival of the left in most of the South American countries also provided incentives to bypass the US influence in an age of unilateralism and military adventurism under George W. Bush.

Until the 2008/2009 crisis seemed to be a period of increasing influence of LAC in world politics, not only due to the fastest economic growth, but also because of the collective will to enhance the political and economic opportunities of a favorable international environment characterized by high commodities prices, satisfactory terms of trade, easy and cheap access to international financing and the outstanding rise of China [5].

However, the international financial crisis started affecting the positive economic externalities and therefore, producing negative impacts on the political sustainability of the left-wing governments, such as the cases of Brazil under Dilma and the post-Chavez's Venezuela [6]. At the same time, great power rivalry become again a central element of international politics after the uncalculated consequences of the 2003 Iraq's invasion and the revitalization of the Russia Federation in Central Eurasia. In a more turbulent economic and military context, LAC has entered again in a new wave of regional peripherization with a declining regional agency.

In the first section, I introduce the global scenario in which LAC countries engage with the U.S. and Russia by focusing on the geopolitical and security agenda. Then, I present the Russia's strategy in Latin America and how it deals with global and regional changes. Finally, I present comparative data on voting behavior in two fields. First, at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on how LAC vote in general regarding the U.S. and the Russian positions. Second, how major LAC countries has voted at UNGA and the UN Security Council (UNSC) in the two major Eurasian conflicts: Georgia and Ukraine.

A new global geopolitical scenario

The geopolitical uncertainty is the new name of normality in the international order. According to Richard Falk, we are living a period "where there is no coherent geopolitical structure, with various tendencies present, ranging from a continuing global war on terror to a second Cold War to a new set of alignments and rivalries associated with a rising China and newly assertive Russia" [7, p. 42]. In a new global scenario characterized by the rise of geopolitical tensions and the displacement of economic dynamism from the Atlantic to the Asia Pacific, have been generating a "new global gravitational pull" in which Russia and China has advanced ambitious projects to integrate the whole Eurasia [8]. The current uncertainty shows some glimmers of a new configuration of the international order, in which the future of geopolitics is closer to the "Return of Marco Polo's World" in which the America's ability to shape the power balance in Eurasia is decreasing [9].

One of the most outstanding examples of these upcoming arrangement have been the publication of the new Trump's National Security Strategy, presented in December 2017, asserts that the US "will respond to the growing political, economic, and military competitions we face around the world. China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests" [10]. Frontal tensions between US and the People's Republic of China around the US-led trade war is novel, but the US-Russian ties had suffered a clear deterioration since mid-2000s, despite some initiatives to find some *modus vivendi* such as the 'Reset' attempt under the early Obama's administration.

The structural problems were *in crescendo*. A comprehensive expansion of US-led interests in Eastern Europe, Middle East and the Post-Soviet space matched with a new

wave of external assertiveness from Moscow. NATO accomplished an expansion towards the borderlines of the Russia Federation including former Soviet countries such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (2004), while the Eastern Enlargement process of the European Union reached its peak with the incorporation of Bulgaria and Romania (2007), while trying to pull apart Ukraine from the Russian Federation.

By using a mix of defensive and offensive strategies, Russia has returned to the great power league after a couple of decades of intensive competence in the strategic and military arena throughout the Great Eurasia space. A later US hegemonic retreat from the Middle East left further space for a more adventurist Moscow's foreign policy in a region abandoned since the demise of the Soviet Union. The new strategic environment had been characterized by the existence of armed conflicts from the Black Sea to the Middle East has revitalized the role of military power, in addition to provide room for external intervention for regional and extra-regional great powers. In this context, there has been an expected consequence, the increasing Russia — NATO tensions, which also lead to characterize this new strategic environment as a revival of the Cold War era.

In this sense, the return of geopolitical factors such as the enforcement of zone of influences and the rejection of extra-regional hard engagement have been major drivers in the Eurasia region heated up frozen disputes generating armed conflicts — with Russia's direct and indirect intervention — although without large-scale confrontation. Two conflicts are particularly relevant to understand the today's Central Eurasia: Georgia and Ukraine.

The cooperative environment in Eurasia started to fall apart with the Russo-Georgian 2008 conflict. During this dispute, two Black Sea littoral states not only engaged in military actions, but the maritime space was the theater of a naval battle, off the coast of Abkhazia, for the first time since the Second World War. The 'Five-Day War' (8–12 August 2008) started when the Georgian Army entered the Tskhinvali region of South Ossetia. As a response, Russia began a 'peace coercion operation' against Georgia, which would end in the military defeat of Georgia and the subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Regarding Ukraine, the crisis had its proximate roots in the final track of the negotiations between the EU and Ukraine to sign the Association Agreement. This was initially supported by the Ukrainian President Yanukovich; however, his government backpedaled in November 2013. When Yanukovich abandoned his position after the 'Euromaidan' protests, pro-Russian demonstrations started in Crimea. Then, the Crimean Parliament called for a referendum asking whether the people would be in favor of being part of Russia or continuing as part of Ukraine by getting back the 1992 Constitution, which granted greater autonomy. The first option won the referendum — which both Ukraine and the West described as illegal — and by March 18, the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol had become federal subjects of the Russian Federation. At the same time, a low-intensity internal war continues in the Eastern Ukraine between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian forces.

As a case of conceptual stretching and a misleading historical analogy, analyst and officials started to characterize the novel era of confrontation — especially after the 2008 Georgian crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian gas dispute between 2008 and 2009 — as kind of a 'New Cold War'.

At the Munich Security Conference 2007, Putin criticized the idea of an unipolarity since the world was "witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force — military

force — in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts” in which “finding a political settlement also becomes impossible” [11]. A year later with the return of conflicts in the post-Soviet space, Lucas presents the notion of a New Cold War fought through cash, natural resources, diplomacy, and propaganda in which “the battle lines [...] are increasingly clear: America, Britain, and some European countries, mostly ex-communist ones, are trying to stand up against the Kremlin” [12, p. 10]. Almost a decade later, the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev criticized the Western approach toward Russia and stated that “NATO’s policy towards Russia remains unfriendly and generally obdurate. Speaking bluntly, we are rapidly rolling into a period of a new cold war. Russia has been presented as well-nigh the biggest threat to NATO, or to Europe, America and other countries” [13]. Lately Putin dismissed this idea as a matter of propaganda, not reflecting the nature of the international order [14], but the narrative of a ‘new Cold War’ stands firm especially among think tanks, officials and national institutions dealing with defense and security areas in the West.

Despite the false analogies between the old Cold War system and the new international reality [15], Russia is portrayed in the West as a challenger, competitor or destabilizer in various dimensions, including on regional strategic competence around US zones of influence such as the Western Hemisphere [16; 17].

A challenger? Moscow’s strategy in Latin America

During a presentation at the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2015, the Commander of the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) — later White House Chief of Staff for President Donald Trump-, General John Kelly denounced that, as part of its grand strategy, “Russia is using power projection in an attempt to erode U.S. leadership and challenge U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere” while developing ‘Cold War-tactics’ by the Russian leadership [18]. A research published by the Mark Smith within the Russian Series of UK Defence Academy agrees in the intertwined relation between the Moscow’s global strategy, its multipolar vision of world politics and the declining US influence both globally and in Latin America [19, p. 2]. With ups and downs, there has been an increasing overlapping of visions in the Western capitals between the narrative of the ‘new Cold War’ and the ‘concerning Russian activities’ in Latin America.

Beyond these oversimplifications, relations between Russia and LAC should be traced far behind this intense global scenario. Despite geographical and cultural remoteness, first diplomatic ties started in the 19th century during the Tzarist Empire [20, p. 5], while the presence peaked in the Cold War with the development of a ‘dual foreign policy’ from Moscow based on strategic interest of the Soviet Union and the implementation of a revolutionary line, despite the U.S. efforts to avoid Latin America from establishing extensive connections [21, p. 214–215].

The end of the Soviet Union impacted both positive and negatively on regional relations. On one side, in the short-term, the economic and social collapse of the newly born Russian Federation affected immediately the trade ties, while the contraction of its global commitments means the loss of interest in the Third World in general, and Latin America in particular. The widespread perception of Russia’s LAC partners was of abandonment, especially by Cuba. The relinquishment of about 500 projects in the Caribbean island, “led to the deterioration of Moscow’s image, creating an impression of Russia as a disloyal partner,

not only in Cuba, but throughout the region, even in countries opposing to Castro's regime. Moscow came to be regarded as a minor, uncritically minded partner of the West" [22, p. 92].

On the other side, in a longer term, the political and international identity of the new Russia set the bases for a more 'normal' relation without the constraints of an ideological war, hegemonic challenge and the duality of Soviet goals, thus allowing a new route for pragmatism. This new reality initially would appear with the Latin American tour of the Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1996/97 and his vision of a multipolar world and a proposed multi-vectoral foreign policy in which Latin America become one of such vectors [21, p. 215]. A limited engagement with LAC was advanced also by a public-private interest around the energy and military-industrial sectors with companies such as Lukoil, Gazprom, Rosneft and Rosoboronexport [23].

The complex interaction between a power-oriented global strategy and pragmatic economic interests would provide the basis for a 'new policy' in the region towards LAC. In this sense, the international environment, particularly the U.S. — Russian relations, would shape the difficult equilibria between prioritize geostrategic or economic-based pragmatic strategies. In this case, I assumed that more US-Russia tension would usually lead to a more geopolitical and tic-tac-toe approaches in LAC than in a relaxed bilateral and multilateral environment. A new duality in the Russia's strategy towards LAC would be constrained not by the Moscow's own preferences, but on the increasingly uncertain global chess game.

Going back to the 'new policy', in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Russia perceived that the region still had an important degree of agency and autonomy vis-a-vis US. In this sense, the "change in Russian views about relations with the LAC was a result of geopolitical concerns: from Moscow's perspective, Latin America is a key geopolitical region in a multipolar world. Brazil, the largest country in the region, plays a particularly important role with its claim for a permanent seat on the UNSC, and its membership of BRICS — a group of emerging economies that strongly advocate the multipolar world order. Argentina, Brazil and México are also members of the G20" [21, p. 216].

In the early 2000s, the Kremlin's strategy towards LAC was characterized by a pragmatic stance, without aiming to undermine directly U.S. interests in the Hemisphere. For example, Putin announced in 2001 the closure of the Lourdes' communication intelligence facility in Cuba. However, after the Russo-Georgian 2008 conflict, Russia has been rising its profile in the region by advancing presidential visits (Table 1), arms and energy deals, trade and military actions (Table 2).

The new environment pushed Russia to alter the balance between geostrategic imperatives and economic pragmatism. The strategy would change towards a mimic-like approach trying to mirror the uncomfortable U.S. and NATO policies in the post-Soviet area, with more assertive political and military actions in the Western Hemisphere, thus playing the 'geopolitical game' [26]. However, the new strategy's main objective did not aim to displace or challenge the US hegemony, but to increase its costs of involvement in the Russian 'near abroad'. At the same time, in LAC there was fertile ground for this kind of transoceanic adventures, Bolivarian left-wing governments. For example, Nicaragua and Venezuela recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia not only as a signal of friendship to Russia, but of regional resistance towards the US — especially those from the ALBA, Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, — while the rest of left-wing governments would try to strengthen their positions towards the US.

Table 1. Presidential, Prime Minister and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Visits from the Russian Federation to LAC

Year	Authority	Visited Countries
1996/7	MFA Yevgeny Primakov	Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil and Colombia
2000	Vladimir Putin	Cuba
2004	Vladimir Putin	Brazil and Chile (APEC Summit)
2006	MFA Sergei Lavrov	Brazil
2008	Dmitry Medvedev	Perú, Brazil, Venezuela and Cuba
2013	MFA Sergei Lavrov	Ecuador y Venezuela
2010	Dmitry Medvedev	Argentina and Brazil (BRICS Meeting)
2012	Vladimir Putin	Mexico (G20 Meeting)
2013	MFA Sergei Lavrov	Brazil
2014	MFA Sergei Lavrov	Nicaragua, Cuba, Chile, y Peru
2014	Vladimir Putin	Cuba, Nicaragua, Argentina and Brazil (BRICS Meeting)
2015	MFA Sergei Lavrov	Cuba, Nicaragua, Perú y Colombia
2016	Vladimir Putin	Peru (APEC Meeting)
2018	Vladimir Putin	Argentina (G20 Meeting)

Table 2. Bilateral trade between Latin America and the Caribbean and Russian Federation (in USD millions)

Year	LAC Exports	LAC Imports	Total Trade
1992	1382,0	540,8	1922,8
1995	2295,0	1059,7	3354,7
2001	2127,6	4272,4	6400
2005	5614,5	5239,7	10854,2
2010	7088,9	4813,8	11902,7
2011	7696,1	7802,9	15499
2012	7028,4	8520,6	15549
2013	7273,9	9055,7	16329,6
2014	8230,4	9181,7	17412,1
2015	5669,5	6996,2	12665,7
2016	5335,4	6269,0	11604,4
2017	6089,5	6872,4	12961,9

Source: [22; 23].

Among the key facts that Russian military and security forces advanced were the participation of the Russian Navy in military exercises with the Venezuelan Navy (VEN-RUS-200, 2008), sending two long-range bombers Tu-160 to Venezuela (2008), opening a counternarcotic center facility in Nicaragua (2017), providing an oceanographic research vessel (Yantar, Project 22010-class) to find the missing Argentine Submarine ARA San Juan (2018) and lately, announcing the reopening of a communications facility in Cuba (2019), in addition to renew military co-operation with Cuba and Venezuela and develop naval deployments in the Caribbean ports and the Atlantic Ocean [27].

Since mid-2010s, two of the fundamental vectors of the Russia's mimic-like strategy began to fall apart, the political retreat of the leftist governments and the socio-economic collapse of Venezuela. Even if the ideology is a secondary element in the Moscow's security and foreign policy, the political turn toward the right is not. The end of the PT rule in Brazil and the displacement of *Frente para la Victoria* in Argentina by the Cambiemos Alliance lead by Mauricio Macri has made the cooperation with extra-regional powers less autonomous from the US pressure in South America. In a novel political context, marked by the existence of strong internal crises, the major actors are not so interested in bothering the regional hegemon by increasing their ties with Russia, especially on the sensitive strategic issues. At the same time, the new wave of center-right and rightist governments perceived negatively the still ongoing relations between Russia and the ALBA's countries. Agreeing with Jefeets *et al.*, these 'ideologization' "limits Moscow's attempts to build contacts with opposition forces in these countries and creates serious risks for Russian businesses in the event of inevitable political change" [21, p. 224].

LAC — US — Russia triad at the United Nations

Based on political and strategic preferences, Russia has prioritized bilateralism in the relations with LAC, underlying partnership with those countries who has supported Moscow's positions in international fora such as the United Nations. Then, it pays attention to those leading regional and political such as Brazil, Mexico and Argentina which shares G20 membership. Even if multilateralism is not the central approach in its foreign policy strategy, it is for LAC countries which usually develop an active agenda in which advance key issues of their agenda such as the Brasilia's quest for a permanent seat at the UNSC or the Malvinas Issue for Argentina. In this context, the multilateral fora is also relevant for the Russian diplomacy to track the degree of closeness and support towards its positions.

LAC, US and Russian voting at UN General Assembly

Historically, LAC and Russia have a high degree of cohesiveness in voting preferences at the UNGA. It is not the same in relation to the US. In this case, what matters is not the voting distance, but the evolution of the LAC voting regarding these two global actors. To assess the interactions between LAC and Russia, and to compare the distance of the preferences with the US, I present data which shows the proportion of LAC votes that match with votes cast by Russia or the US on the same issue based on the deal points derived from states' UNGA vote choices from 1991 until 2015. The UN Ideal Points Data help us to measure temporal variability in the positions between pair of states, while also provide us a basis for comparative evolution with third states or group of states.

The ideal point data is built on the Lijphart's index of agreement between two states. In the "United Nations General Assembly Voting Data" dataset 1 equals a state that always agrees with the other state, and 0 if it never agrees. It should be noted that the ideal point estimate analysis can be complimented by votes identified as important by the U.S. State Department, around 7–12 a year [28]. In relation to the US-Russia relations, ideal point estimate was already tested successfully since the "gap between the ideal points does not fluctuate erratically" and the "model accurately keeps the two countries much further apart during the Cold War than at any point during the Cold War's aftermath" [29].

In the case of the LAC voting behavior, in the Fig. 1 I present the mean of their positions *vis-a-vis* US, Russia and Brazil. I include Brazil to measure the degree of cohesiveness among the Latin American and Caribbean Group at the United Nations, which is quite elevated. In the Fig. 2, I arranged a common stance based on the mean of the LAC main regional powers' positions: Argentina, Brazil and Mexico towards US and Russia.

The ideal points derived from LAC vote choices at UNGA portraits a closer and permanent relation in the multilateral preferences with Russia over US, with a series of ups and downs which can strengthen previous arguments on the impact of systemic factors

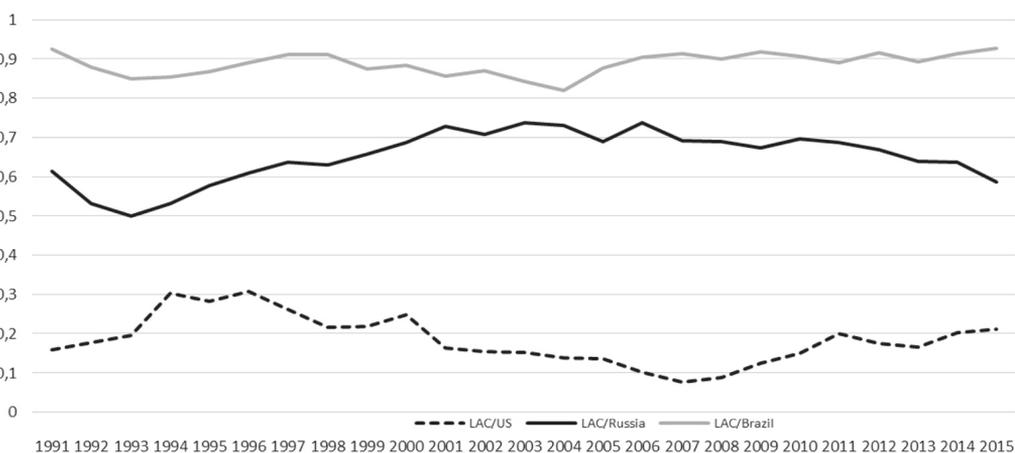


Fig. 1. UN Ideal Points Data — LAC with the U.S., Russia and Brazil at the AGNU

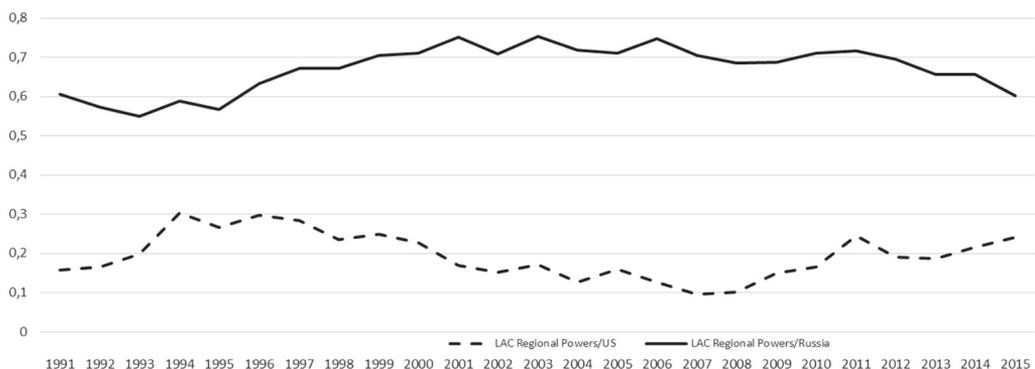


Fig. 2. UN Ideal Points Data — LAC Regional Powers (Argentina, Brazil and Mexico) with the U.S. and Russia

on the LAC behavior and the Russian geopolitical/pragmatic balance in the foreign policy towards LAC. First, it seems that an active Russian diplomacy within a low-tension environment between US and Russia pays positively in the UNGA voting behavior. Since the 1996/97 Primakov visit until the year before the Georgian crisis, the multilateral closeness would increase more than 10 %. On the contrary, high-level visits and multiple diplomatic, economic and military activities cannot reverse a negative trajectory if bilateral tensions among these two great powers rise up. In the 2008–2015 period, the distance between the ideal points grew more than 14 %. The conjunction of an assertive Russia and the multiplication of anxieties in the relations US did not help Moscow's role in the Western Hemisphere. The second graph show similar tendencies, while the degree of closeness with US is barely higher in the last decade. In this case, it should be useful to address how the major LAC regional powers reacted to the armed conflicts in Central Eurasia.

Brazil, Argentina and Mexico face Eurasian conflicts

After the Russian short military intervention in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the diplomatic choices around an international recognition of these new entities were not a difficult choice. Argentina, Brazil and Mexico remained neutral during the conflict while later they do not recognize these entities as independent states based on the principle of territorial integrity. In the formal statements, Brazil called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict based on the mediation of the Council of Europe and reaffirmed the “commitment to the principles of peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for the territorial integrity and respect for human rights” [30, p. 223–224].

The Ministries of Foreign Relations in Argentina and Mexico released official positions in the same line. After the Russia's international recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and contrary to the Nicaragua and Venezuela's decision, the three countries reacted unanimously although without risking their relationship with Russia. Brazilian MFA Celso Amorim stated that “Brazil defends very strongly the principle of territorial integrity of States and we do not believe that this should be relativized” [29], while Argentina grounded in that principle its position regarding the Malvinas and the Islands of the South Atlantic. Years later, during a bilateral visit Argentinean MFA Hector Timmerman openly said that “Buenos Aires recognizes the territorial integrity of Georgia and advocates a peaceful solution to the problem” [31]. On its side, Mexico underlined his concern about regional and global stability, and call both sides for a peaceful and lasting solution in the Caucasus region through dialogue [32]. During the conflict, Costa Rica and Panama were at the UNSC but there were not serious discussions unless the extension of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) which resolution was approved unanimously on 9 October 2008. After less than one year, Russia vetoed a resolution authorizing another extension [33].

The moderation of the regional leading countries would be seen again during the Ukrainian crisis. On 15 March, a day before the Crimean status referendum, most of the Western allies submit a draft resolution on Ukraine (S/2014/189) at the UNSC that was not adopted due to the Russian veto. No Latin American country joined the presentation of the draft resolution, but Chile and Argentina voted favorably. According to the Ambassador Perceval, “because it asserted the principle of territorial integrity and would have contributed to constructive dialogue towards a peaceful solution involving all political actors” [34].

Regarding the UNGA, for Moscow was crucial for its LAC regional policy the opinion of the Brazil, Argentina and Mexico in the voting of the resolution A/68/262¹ on 27 March 2014 (on the territorial integrity of Ukraine and against Russia's activities in Crimea) after the referendum and the later accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation. In GRULAC, the vote was not unanimous. Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Ecuador — among others — abstained, while the countries of the newly born Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia, Peru and Mexico) voted in favor. Finally, the Bolivarian axis (Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela and Nicaragua) rejected.

The Argentine UN Ambassador Perceval disagreed on the politically-bias interpretation of the territorial integrity principle stated in the draft resolution, while “rejects initiatives that seek to isolate one of the parties or impose unilateral economic sanctions that undermine the conditions conducive to a dialogue that is so urgent” [35, p. 20]. In this case, presidential diplomacy between Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and Vladimir Putin played a key role [37]. On Brazil, the Ambassador Patriota called for restraint and a diplomatic solution of the crisis [35, p. 7], in addition to various tensions with the US around the vulture funds issue.

In later voting on situation of human rights in the Crimean Peninsula, Brazil, Argentina and Mexico at AGNU abstained in 2016 and 2017 (A/RES/71/205 y A/RES/72/190). Even if the political coalitions and ideological orientation changed both in Argentina and Brazil, they did not move their balanced positions regarding the Crimean issue, maintaining a sphere of autonomy in an issue characterized by the US State Department as an ‘important vote’ for the 71st UNGA in 2016. The voting behavior on the Crimean issue reflected the left-right cleavage, but in the specific case of norms involving criticism on human rights still matters principles of sovereignty and non-intervention which characterized the normative basis of the Latin American diplomacy inward and outward [4; 38].

Mirror game and the decline of the regional agency: the limits of the Moscow's strategy

By using a systemic arguments and empirical referents, the article shows that US-Russia are affecting negatively Moscow's regional strategy and its influence in the region. The region is going through a declining phase of its regional agency which is affecting the relations with extra-regional powers, especially those more concerned on the hard than the soft agenda. For example, despite the increasing pressures, China is suffering less than Russia since the Beijing's strategy relies more on economic incentives than political interests. Russia's regional mimic strategy had shown its limits, not because of the lack of will on the Moscow's side, but due to the changing regional scenario in which there was a transformation of the political landscape from left to right-wing governments which usually perceive the US as the major partner in the region, or at least, they do not see as a menace. In addition to the political changes, major LAC regional powers are suffering deep political and economic crisis such as Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela, which limits the odds to act with assertiveness in the global arena.

¹ The draft resolution was initially submitted by Canada, Costa Rica, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.

References

1. Tulchin, J. (2016) *Latin America in international politics: challenging US hegemony*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, USA.
2. Walt, S. (2018), *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, USA.
3. Long, T. (2016), *Latin America Confronts the United States: Asymmetry and Influence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
4. Burges, S. and Bastos, F. (2016), "Latin American Diplomacy", in Constantinou, C., Kerr, P. and Sharp, P. (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, Sage Publications, New York, USA, pp.373–384.
5. Ocampo, J., Reis, M. and Bastian, E. (2016), "On the Latin American Decade", *Initiative for Policy Dialogue*, Working Paper no. 297, available at: http://policydialogue.org/files/publications/papers/On_the_Latin_America_Decade.pdf (accessed: 10.11.2018).
6. Malamud, A. (2016) "¿Por qué retrocede la izquierda en América Latina?", in Leiras, M., Malamud, A., Stefanoni, P. *¿Por qué retrocede la izquierda? Capital Intelectual / Le Monde Diplomatique*, Buenos Aires, pp. 47–80.
7. Falk, R. (2018), "Through a Glass Darkly: The Past, Present, and Future of Turkish Foreign Policy", in Parlar Dal, E. (ed.), *Middle Powers in Global Governance — The Rise of Turkey*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, USA, pp. 35–51.
8. Serbin, A. "La configuración de la Gran Eurasia y su impacto en la gobernanza global", *Anuario CEI-PAZ*, 2017–2018, pp. 121–139.7.
9. Kaplan, R. (2018), *The Return of Marco Polo's World: War, Strategy, and American Interests in the Twenty-First Century*, Random House, New York, USA.
10. *White House. National Security Strategy (NSS) 2017*, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
11. Putin, V. (2007), Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
12. Lucas, E. (2008), *The New Cold War — Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, USA.
13. Medvedev, D. (2016), *Munich Security Conference: Dmitry Medvedev's speech at the panel discussion*, available at: <http://government.ru/en/news/21784/> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
14. Nee Lee, Y. (2018), Putin: Our new weapons 'easily' beat anti-missile systems — but this is no Cold War, available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/01/nbc-interviews-russia-president-vladimir-putin-on-weapons-cold-war.html> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
15. Westad, O. (2018), "Has a New Cold War Really Begun? Why the Term Shouldn't Apply to Today's Great-Power Tensions", *Foreign Affairs*, no. 3, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-03-27/has-new-cold-war-really-begun> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
16. Ellis, E. (2015), *The New Russian Engagement with Latin America: Strategic Position, Commerce, and Dreams of the Past*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, USA.
17. Cox, D. (2016), *Return of the Bear? Russia's Ties with Former Soviet Allies in Latin America*, MA Thesis, Studies Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey.
18. Kelly, J. (2015), Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, United States Marine Corps Commander, United States Southern Command before the 114th Congress Senate Armed Services Committee, available at: https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Kelly_03-12-15.pdf (accessed: 10.11.2018).
19. Smith, M. (2009), *Russia & Latin America: Competition in Washington's "Near Abroad"?*, available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/104344/09_Aug.pdf (accessed: 10.11.2018).
20. Davydov, V. (2010), "Rusia en América Latina (y viceversa)" [Russia in Latin America (and viceversa)], *Revista Nueva Sociedad*, no. 226, pp. 4–12.
21. Jeifets, V., Khadorich, L. and Leksyutina, Y. (2018), "Russia and Latin America: Renewal versus continuity", *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, no. 17, vol. 2, pp. 213–228.
22. Jeifets, V. (2015), "Russia is coming back to Latin America: perspectives and obstacles", *Anuario de la Integración Regional de América Latina y el Caribe — América Latina y el Caribe y el nuevo sistema internacional: Miradas desde el Sur*, CRIES, Buenos Aires, Argentina, pp. 90–102.
23. Zubelzú, G. (2010), "La presencia rusa en América Latina: alcance, focos de interés y límites" [The Russian presence in Latin America: scope, focuses of interest and limits], *V Congreso Latinoamericano de Ciencia Política*, Asociación Latinoamericana de Ciencia Política Buenos Aires, available at: <http://cdsa.academica.org/000-036/398.pdf> (accessed: 10.11.2018).

24. Davydov, V. (2016), *Latinoamérica: Rutas del Desarrollo y Lazos con Rusia. Percepción desde Moscú* [Latin America: the Ways of Development and Ties with Russia], Instituto de Latinoamérica de la Academia de Ciencias de Rusia, Moscow, Russia.
25. Trade Map. 2001–2017 (2018), available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx (accessed: 10.11.2018).
26. Gurganus, J. (2018), *Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
27. Foggo III, J. and Fritz, A. (2016), “The Fourth Battle of the Atlantic”, *Proceedings Magazine*, vol. 142/6/1,360, available at: <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2016-06/fourth-battle-atlantic> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
28. Voeten, E., Strezhnev, A. and Bailey, M. (2009), *United Nations General Assembly Voting Data*, Harvard Dataverse, available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/1902.1/12379> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
29. Voeten, E., Strezhnev, A. and Bailey, M. (2017), “Estimating dynamic state preferences from united nations voting data”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, no. 61, vol. 2, pp. 430–546.
30. Mello Barreto, F. (2012), *A Política externa após a redemocratização* [Foreign Policy after Redemocratization], vol. II, 2003–2010, Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, Brasília, Brazil.
31. Amorim, C. (2008), *Habla el Canciller Brasileño, Celso Amorim* [The Brazilian Chancellor speaks: Celso Amorim], available at: https://www.clarin.com/ediciones-antteriores/pago-club-paris-bueno-argentina-bueno-region_0_BkreeGhRpKx.html (accessed: 10.11.2018).
32. *Se realizó la primera visita oficial de la Argentina a Georgia para fomentar relaciones bilaterales* [The first official visit of Argentina to Georgia was made to promote bilateral relations] (2012), available at: <https://www.iprofesional.com/notas/144258-Se-realizo-la-primera-visita-oficial-de-la-Argentina-a-Georgia-para-fomentar-relaciones-bilaterales> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
33. *Preocupa a México situación en Osetia del Sur y Abjasia* [Mexico worries about situation in South Osetia and Abjasia] (2008), available at: http://wradio.com.mx/radio/2008/08/27/nacional/1219896240_660053.html (accessed: 10.11.2018).
34. Lynch, C. (2009), *Russia Vetoes Resolution on U.N. Peacekeepers in Georgia*, *Washington Post*, available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/15/AR2009061503047.html> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
35. *Security Council Fails to Adopt Text Urging Member States Not to Recognize Planned 16 March Referendum in Ukraine’s Crimea Region* (2014), available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11319.doc.htm> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
36. *United Nations General Assambly. A/68/PV. 80* (2014), available at: <http://undocs.org/A/68/PV.80> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
37. *Vladimir Putin llamó a Cristina Kirchner para reconocer su postura en el conflicto de Crimea* [Vladimir Putin called Cristina Kirchner to recognize her position in the Crimean conflict] (2009), available at: <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/1675230-vladimir-putin-llamo-a-cristina-kirchner-para-reconocer-su-postura-en-el-conflicto-de-crimea> (accessed: 10.11.2018).
38. Merke, F. (2015), “Neither balance nor bandwagon: South American international society meets Brazil’s rising power”, *International Politics*, no. 52, vol. 2, pp. 178–192.

Received: November 20, 2018

Accepted: February 14, 2019

Author’s information:

Ariel González Levaggi — PhD; agonzalez@uca.edu.ar