

THE CULTURE OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND THE RAPPROCHMENT OF SOUTH AMERICA AND UNITED STATES¹

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Introduction

In some countries of South America, the history of extreme poverty and social inequalities is being rewritten. Unlike the 1980s, marked by governments called neoliberal and IMF prescriptions, motivated by the Washington Consensus, the governments of the three Andean countries - Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia - have been implementing policies and social projects with some success in the last 16 years.

Not only assistance projects and the redistribution of income, housing, health, education, protectionist policies and nationalization of natural resources created new forms of political participation of society, but also have contributed to intensify the national and international ideological disputes. However, from 2015 onwards, political instabilities raised the debate on the future of these three countries and their consequences for foreign policy. This article discusses the foreign policy of the three Andean countries and its rela-

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tionship with the United States, taking into account the current Venezuelan, Ecuadoran and Bolivian political crisis.

In the late 1990s, South America has entered a phase of polarization between governments: the ones who claimed a so-called institutional continuity and the governments of Hugo Chavez (Venezuela), Evo Morales (Bolivia) and Rafael Correa (Ecuador), who proclaimed willingness to recreate the State and social democracy. The action of these agents produced tensions that spill over regionally and their actions are not restricted to their respective countries. They enlarge their political references and make use of their cultural identities and supranational histories, as in the case of Simon Bolivar.

As well as in the domestic realm, considering the past of poverty in these countries, there are significant changes in foreign policy that are related to the internal arena. These governments emphasize the strategy of cooperation and integration among Latin American countries, closer ties with China and Russia, and agreements for South-South cooperation. Another decision taken by the three countries that would affect the external interface was the nationalization of mineral and energy resources exploited until then by US and European companies. So in a greater extent, US interests were affected in the region.

Some authors argue that Latin America was increasingly less relevant to the United States, and that this trend was deepened by the events of September 11, 2001 (Ayerbe 2008, Fuentes 2004). However, this little attention is in contrast with US interest in the mineral and strategic resources in the region (among others). There is a vast literature on the historical US dominance in Latin America (Bandeira 2010, Ayerbe 2002, Pecequillo 2011 and 2012, Nye 1990 and 2002, Kagan 2012, Vizentini and Wiesebron 2006) that shows that the US was always paying attention to hemispheric affairs, despite the adoption of different strategies.

In the early 20th century, US President Woodrow Wilson changed the vision that the country had developed for its domestic consumption, and turned it into an operational program to be applied to the whole world. Since then, this same world had to pay attention to the US, both due to the reach of its vision, as well as due to its strength. (Kissinger 2015, 485). If this thought is still in place, US seemingly indifference to the region, supported by some circles, would not make sense. Indeed, the United States seems interested in the unfolding of the current crisis in the three Andean countries. Elements to provide answers to these questions are presented below based on the analysis of domestic and foreign policy of the three Andean countries.

The foreign policy of Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia: *politics “from below”; Proud, dignified and sovereign homeland; partners, not bosses*

Venezuela’s foreign policy, with the entry of Hugo Chavez, is marked by multipolarity, nationalism and the defense of Latin American integration. These three pillars are found in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian policies, respectively the governments of Rafael Correa and Evo Morales. Are they related to the export of Chavez ideas? The reasoning related to the simple migration of Chavez model seems simplistically since it disregards that there was (and there is) in place a same framework of capitalist logic and domination facing these countries. The nationalization and control of natural resources were central points for Chavez, but the motivational source of these actions are made of historical struggles of the region and sometimes have been attempted by other countries. This is the case of Bolivia in 1952 and the nationalization of mines controlled by Patiño groups, Hochschild and Aramayo. As Marx said in known passage of “The Communist Manifesto”, despite national peculiarities, industrial work and modern subjection to capital are the same in all countries, which deprived them of their national character.

Hugo Chavez ’ s foreign policy “from below”

Hugo Chavez foreign policy, followed by his successor Nicolas Maduro⁴, has three dimensions: a confrontation with the United States, the pursuit of Venezuela’s dominant position in Latin America through the creation of the ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) and relations with Brazil and Mercosur (Carmo 2008). Chavez strategy was to search for his strengthening domestically and to seek international support for his national project. Therefore, with his speech and his policy to deal with social inequalities - a policy for “los de abajo” - Chavez enlarged this approach to the international scene.

Inside Venezuela, and politically, the former democratic liberal model

4 Chavez was ahead the government for 14 straight years. He was elected by popular vote in 1998 to five years in office. To modify the Constitution and increase the president's power, a referendum was held soon after his election. Due to this change, it was necessary to hold another election, and Chavez was elected again in 2001. He took office in 2000 and 2007 for his mandates. In 2006, he was reelected once more, for a term ending in 2012. In the following elections, he was elected for a third term but he died in 2013. A new presidential election was convened and Nicolas Maduro, his political successor was elected.

that extended for 42 years and was based on two parties - Acción Democrática, a social democrat one, and Copei, the center-right Christian Democrat, was put to an end. Aligned with social movements, Chavez government implemented a new constitution in 2007, by a popular referendum, affecting the political and legal structures of the country, jettisoning the traditional elites of decisions. This internal confrontation required external support. A closer approximation and cooperation with Cuba - selling oil to this country below market prices since 1999 - was the strategy underlining the closeness with countries identified with Chavez social project.

The idea of a foreign policy “from below” followed the same principle of maximizing internal social policies in order to gain popular support; this way, Chavez implements a multipolar strategy and of support for Latin American countries (Ellner 2008). Venezuelan foreign policy gained a strong regional focus, in particular due to its defense of the region’s interests and the direct confrontation with other foreign interests. Therefore, foreign policy should strengthen alliances between countries with progressive governments, links with other countries in the region and with powers outside the US zone of influence. In the arch of Latin American alliances, Chavez distanced himself from Mexico and Peru Presidents, Vincent Fox and Alan Garcia due to their ties with the United States. He also distanced himself from certain international organizations and agencies since, in his view, they were the representatives of North American interests.

To reinforce this strategy of relations from below in 2006, Chavez withdrew Venezuela from the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) in response to agreements that Peru and Colombia had signed with the United States. According to Ellner (2009), for Chavez, “these agreements favored elites and transnational companies, and do not represent the interests of indigenous people, or afro descendants, or the poor”. At the same time the Venezuelan president was leading the creation of UNASUR and pushing for Venezuelan membership in Mercosur, which took place in July 2012.

The distancing between Caracas and Washington built up due to Chavez policies such as: the nationalization of the exploration of mineral resources, especially oil, by the creation of the state-owned oil company (PDVSA), restrictions on the foreign companies actions and the rapprochement with Cuba, Iraq and Libya (seen as US enemies).

Event tough political relations were not good the same cannot be applied to trade. Nowadays, almost five hundred US companies are represented in Venezuela and the US have direct investment concentrated largely in the oil sector and in the country’s industrial production. According to the US Department of State, the country’s complex exchange rate regime, the fall in oil

export revenues and the drop in global oil prices deprived US companies access to dollars that would enable them to send their profits abroad. In addition to this adverse situation to US interests, difficulties to import industrial raw materials and finished products to Venezuela, insufficient access to dollars, price controls and rigid labor regulations implemented by the Venezuelan government have forced many US and multinational companies to reduce or terminate their operations in Venezuela (U.S. Department of State 2015).

The strategy of sovereignty adopted in Ecuador

Rafael Correa was elected in 2007 with the support of the Ecuadorian left. Although he faced several coup attempts and a kidnapping in 2010, from which he was rescued by military supporters of his government, Correa's government has a significant support from society. This popularity is often explained by thesis based on Weber's theory of traditional domination. This is a fragile vision since the analysis is focused solely on the president's persona. Although Correa is a young politician with a strong popular appeal, social inclusion and access of the poor to basic education and health services policies are the most viable explanations of his popular support. Thus, he is both a charismatic leader and also a leader legitimated strongly by polls. Indeed, Correa was re-elected president in 2013 for another four-year mandate. Its electoral strength also could be noticed in the popular referendum of the new National Constitution⁵ that established the law for the national control of strategic sectors.

Regarding Ecuadorian foreign policy, its guidelines were presented in the government's action plans, the National Plan of Development 2007-2010 (Ecuador 2007) and the National Foreign Policy Plan 2006-2020, *PLANEX 2020* (Ecuador 2006). These plans define nationalism as one of the main axes of the country's foreign policy. The meaning of this agenda is linked to relations with neighboring countries; to hold the United States as a potential threat to the consolidation of democracy in Ecuador; to maintain relations with Europe, mainly focused on Spain, due to stronger historical and cultural ties, strengthened by the presence of more than half a million Ecuadorians in

5 After eight years and seven months in government, Rafael Correa was positively evaluated by 52% of the interviewed (Perfiles de Opinión 2015. Accessed September 20, 2015). In the same period, after conducting several researches, Mexico's Mitofsky Consultant created a presidential approval ranking, and Correa was placed in the fourth place, losing to Danilo Medina of the Dominican Republic (89%, with 33 months in office), Evo Morales (75% with 113 months in office), the Panamenian Juan Carlos Varela (63%, 12 months). (Jornal Andes - Agência Pública de Notícias do Equador e Sul-América, September 9, 2015.)

its territory; and to consider relations with Asian countries, especially China and Japan (Holguín 2012, 43).

Generally speaking, Quito got closer to Venezuela's and Bolivia's stances, and distanced itself from Colombia due to border disputes and the entry of Colombian troops in Ecuadorian territory in pursuit of FARCS in 2008. Closer ties with Iran and Russia, bilateral treaties in energy cooperation with Venezuela – the construction of a refinery and the exchange between PDVSA and Petroecuador - and the strategy of regional integration for the creation of UNASUR and ALBA are guidelines in the Ecuadorian foreign policy agenda. One of the biggest infrastructure integration projects in South America is in Ecuador: the river and road corridor that will link the Brazilian city of Manaus to the port of Manta, in the western part of Ecuador. It will be a corridor to transport goods from the continent from the Pacific, increasing regional trade and offering an alternative route to the Panama Canal. Integration is strategic for the Andean countries and to Brazil, since the port of Manta will be Latin American nearest port to Asia.

Thus, the Manta port is an important issue in the drive of Ecuadorian foreign policy due to the potential for integration. But it was also a contentious issue with the United States. For ten years, from 1999 to 2009, Manta was an US military base in order to control drug trafficking and it was considered a North-American enclave in Ecuador. The non-renewal of the agreement that would have allowed the US to maintain this military base was one of the most important events in these nations' bilateral relations. For the Ecuadorian government, the presence of that military base meant a loss of sovereignty, and that needed to be repaired.

US-Ecuador relations were strained as Quito questioned the manner in which its natural resources were being exploited, its external debt and the forms of foreign investment in the country. Tensions between the two countries gained proportions of a diplomatic rupture when, in April 2011, the Correa government declared the US Ambassador Heather Hodges *persona non grata*, and asked him to leave the country⁶. Finally, Correa's bet to approach Iran and Russia is being considered as one of the most original elements of his foreign policy, indicating a strong interest in distancing from the United States.

Russia's and Ecuador approximation is visible, and it is linked to energy issues. In 2008, in a visit to Ecuador, Sergei Lavrov Russia's Foreign Minister expressed his country's interest in the market and bilateral cooperation.

⁶ According to the official version, the request was due to the information released by the Wikileaks network, regarding US knowledge of an attempt to destabilize the Correa government.

tion in various areas. That included academic education of Hispanic students, oil trade, and gas development of nuclear energy (Agência Brasileira de Inteligência 2016). However, the main strategic bilateral relationship in terms of trade is with China. Several projects in strategic sectors are currently under way in Ecuador, with a significant contribution of Chinese capital. Only in 2015, 15 bilateral agreements were signed and 9 accords in the framework of cooperation, science, technology and education. In addition, one can mention the Mutual Agreement on visas for entry in both countries. Chinese citizens can enter Ecuador without a visa for 90 days, while Ecuadorians can enter China without it for a period of 30 days. This shows Correa's interest to benefit from a larger number of Chinese who annually travel the world, contributing to the inflow of foreign exchange. But Chinese investments in Ecuador are the ones that stand out in the bilateral relationship. In this sense, analysts tend to point out that Ecuador's foreign debt only changed its origins: from the United States to China.

The Bolivian foreign policy: partners, not bosses

When Evo Morales came into power in Bolivia for the first time in 2006, the country was placed among the poorest nations on the continent and it was number one in the list of countries that suffered the highest number of *coups d'État*⁷. The victory of Evo Morales and of the intellectual Álvaro García Linera (vice president) in 2005, with 53.74% of the vote, opened a possible space for similar changes to those seen in Correa and Chavez governments. However, the difference resided in the enlargement of the recognition of ethnic minorities, in the discussion of the types of land ownership and in the creation of indigenous courts. In ten years of government, the country reached the first levels of economic growth in the region and broke the tradition of governments that did not end their mandates. Also, in Bolivia, a new constitution ratified by a popular referendum in 2009⁸ was promoted, establishing the "plurinational" and "intercultural" State based on multiculturalism (Ranincheski and Silva 2012).

There is a direct link between Morales' election and these constitutional changes to foreign policy. For the third time in the history of the country (1937, 1969, 2006), Bolivia promulgated a decree for the nationalization of natural resources, especially the sectors of gas and mining. Bolivia is one of

7 Afterwards, Morales was elected in 2009 with 64% of the vote and in 2014 with 61% of votes.

8 The same process of construction and ratification of a plurinational constitution was held at the Correa government in 2008.

the largest producers of silver, gold, zinc and tin. It has one of the largest iron ore reserves in the world, in the region of El Mutún, and the Salar de Uyuni is one of the world's largest lithium reservoirs. (CEDIB 2004).

Evo Morales adopted a national defense strategy, gave priority to Latin American integration and highlighted the need to establish "fair" and symmetrical relations with international interests. The speech produced by Morales to mark this idea is the slogan "partners, not bosses," paving the way for the criticism from the left and right oppositions, for different reasons. The left calls for an industrial and development project; the right press for the departure of the president and for the return of private control of mineral wealth.

The Bolivian diplomacy follows the idea of a defensive and prospective sovereignty. The defense and revaluation of the coca leaf cultivation and the fight against drugs is embedded in this strategy. For the government of La Paz, the legalization of the production is a matter of national defense. On the other hand, the fight against drug trafficking must be held in a collective manner with international community, without opening spaces to external interference, especially the ones from the US, such as in Colombia. The Bolivian foreign policy also operates in traditional forums such as the UN, through presidential speeches regarding the issue. In September 2008, La Paz expelled the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and in 2013 it did the same with USAID cooperation agency, both on charges of conspiracy.

Usually the explanation to the defense of coca by the Morales government is based on its historical connection with the trade union movement since the 1980s. He was a member of the Single Confederation Union of Campesinos Workers in Bolivia (CSUTCB) and was a member of the board of directors of the Special Federation of the Tropic, one of the six trade union federations of coca leaf producers. However, these actions must be understood as governmental policies that affect relations with the United States, because the problem of drug trafficking in the region is important in American politics and the Andean countries (Avila 2007).

The concurrent diplomacy of defense and reaction can be perceived in the way that Bolivia starts to build its relations with the United States. The country has made a public denunciation of the United States interference in its internal affairs by making use of international organizations as a resource to pressure and destabilize governments or leftist groups in Latin America. Tensions have worsened since 2008 (with the expulsion of the US ambassador in the country), and with Evo Morales's defeat in the February 2016 referendum regarding a law that would ensure his unlimited re-election, conflicts tend to be more intense.

The crises of the Andean bloc: building a culture of instability

The economic and political crisis in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia are frequent and long-standing (on this subject see Oliveira 2013). Based on a more detailed analysis, what makes the 2015 crisis different, is and increased pressure from the opposition and some victories. These victories put at the risk the continuity of the analyzed governments and the current foreign policy agenda of these Andean countries. The possible return of political conservative groups and aligned with international interests that were kept away from power in the last two decades is at stake.

Political crises have been a constant in the Chavez government, including an attempted coup to remove him from power in April 2002. For 48 hours, an alliance between media, business, sectors of the Catholic Church and the military were able to take him off the presidency. US support for the coup was evident in the immediate visit its ambassador to Caracas, Charles Shapiro, made to the coup leader Pedro Carmona, recognizing his government. At the same time, the IMF, announced on the same day, financial resources for Venezuela. Without any support from the population, the Armed Forces and the international community, the action failed, and Chavez was reinstated to the Venezuelan government.

The radicalization of relations with the United States gained strength after that coup attempt. Since 2010, there are no ambassadors in neither of the countries, and diplomatic representations are on the hands of business aides creating a stagnation of diplomatic ties. In 2011 and 2013, Venezuela suffered US sanctions because of its trade energy relation with Iran. PDVSA is banned from competing for government contracts in the US and to apply for Export-Import Bank funding in the United States. But it was Chavez's death in March 2013, that will demand new strategies in order to continue the so-called Bolivarian project. Following up, a new presidential election was held and the candidate Nicolas Maduro won. Maduro was considered Chavez heir without the same charisma and leadership in his predecessor party.

Thus, the recurring supply crisis in Chavez's government, gained new grounds in the Maduro government. The lack of basic basket food, leading to the formation of long queues, is an important factor in the discontent of the population. To some extent, it goes back to the governmental period of Allende in Chile, whose outcome was the military coup staged by General Pinochet in 1973. The government of Allende denounced internationally, including in a UN speech, the existence of an undeclared economic war between the Nixon administration and his own. Analysts pointed out, one year after the coup that

the lesson, if there is any, in the relations between the United States and the Allende government, is that if there is a government that is decided to nationalize US companies without compensations and intends to promote a internal program that effectively destroys its ability to attract investments, one cannot expect to gain aid, neither from the US government, nor from its private companies (Sigmund 1974, 38).

In the Venezuelan case, the government argues that the oligopolistic sectors are deliberately slowing down production as a means of pressure; the productive sectors, in turn, justify that the price adjustment has generated losses and thus, for the industry, the domestic production stays with no incentive. Many stopped milking the cows, since this is no longer a business (Jardim 2007).

The internal pressures suffered by President Maduro, Correa and Morales questioned the political project that was being implemented in each country. The political crises that affect the Brazilian government and the defeat of Cristina Kirchner group in the 2015 elections directly affected the three Andean governments. The new Argentine president, the conservative Mauricio Macri, represents the first possible break of the ties of cooperation that these countries were developing in South America. The statements of Macri on the importance of using the democratic clause in Mercosur to question the permanence of Venezuela indicate new settings for external relations in South America. In addition, perhaps the most prominent fact is the immediate elimination of taxes on exports of mining companies in Argentina.

The 5.5% average economic growth per year during the first two Morales of mandates, IMF's and the World Bank praise received or the performance of economies and the recognition of the eradication of illiteracy by UNESCO in 2014⁹, made it difficult to the action of supporters of the liberal market of large national and international economic interests. The global turmoil in the mineral sectors of oil and gas shows a worrying domestic situation given the dependence of the three countries in the export of natural resources. For 2016, FMI growth forecasts of the GDP indicate a decline in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador.

These economic crises worsened the institutional political crisis in Venezuela, for example. In the 2015 parliamentary elections, the united opposition, Mesa de la Democratic Unity (MUD), was able to elect 107 parliamentarians (64.07%) and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the situation party, reached 55 seats (32.93%) according to official data (CNE, 2015).

9 Irina Bokova, director of UNESCO, highlighted these achievements, such as the process of eradication of illiteracy in Bolivia. See Naciones Unidas en Bolivia 2014.

The opposition will certainly try via parliament not only to remove the Maduro government, but to promote more radical changes to the right. According to a representative of the opposition, the problem of Venezuela can only be changed with structural changes - not with conjecture ones (Guevara, 2016).

Like Venezuela and Bolivia, the economic crises in Ecuador are intrinsically linked to oil exports. On two occasions, in 2009 and 2015, the country faced severe difficulties due to the fall of oil barrel prices. In 2009, the drop occurred due to lower levels of consumption. In 2015 the situation seems to be more complex in view of the serious Middle East conflicts and the need for oil price agreements between OPEC members, the agency that regulates the production and the price of oil. In the first crisis, the overcome of the crisis depended on the reserves that the country had due to the Law for the Recovery of Oil Resources and the questioning and non-payment of external debt. In the 2015 crisis, the government had reserves to support investment, but the ongoing country's dependence on oil exports remains although other exportable products such as bananas, cocoa and shrimp would be available.

The street demonstrations that President Correa faced in 2015, add up to the ones held in 2009, 2010 and 2013, although with a different agenda: they were against the political and economic model, but also against bills sent to the National Assembly as the tax on inheritance and income. The law in force since 2009 inheritances determines that taxes should be collected from the amount of \$ 68,800 onwards. The proposed law project intended to change the amount to \$ 35,400, and the tax was going to be charged progressively. The protests were so significant that forced the Correa government to withdraw the project from the Assembly. Street demonstrations were also against the bill that would increase oil export taxes, which critics say would cause layoffs in the industry (El tiempo). Sectors of the labor movement's opposition to Correa supported these street protests, arguing that it would represent a heavy blow against the poorest as they would be the ones to pay for any increase in prices.

In Bolivia, the crisis of instability are recurring. Despite the positive development that Bolivia achieved, being able to distance itself from the historical and traditional brand as the poorest and most unstable country of the continent, the internal pressures are enhanced by the fall in commodities prices in the international market and the gained ground on the Morales government. Between 2006 and 2015, Bolivia had a significant drop in unemployment (from 10.1% to 4% in the period), significant reductions in extreme poverty, the minimum wage was raised from 500 to 1,656 Bolivian pesos, and malnutrition, combined with the fall in infant mortality from 54.2 to 38 per thousand took place. These indicators, as well as the eradication of illiter-

acy recognized by UNESCO in 2009, made Morales a very popular ruler in the international environment. However, these positive data was not enough to gain Morales a win, in the popular consultation regarding a fourth-term candidacy.

One can notice the built of a culture of instability in the three countries. Despite undeniable progress in social issues, understood as those that directly affect the population's quality of life, particularly the most socially and economically disadvantaged, internal disputes, with the support of the United States and international bodies, seek to overthrow governments, even if this implies profound social and economic disruptions. In the name of political and ideological disagreements, the economical and political stability of the region is threatened.

The United States and relations with the Andean countries

The powerful North American think tank Council on Foreign Relations presented in the 2008, a report of the so-called Group of Independent work with the results of studies and discussions on the relations between the United States and Latin America. The report¹⁰ signals the end of the United States as the dominant country in Latin America and suggests that its policy for the Latin American continent should be restructured in four areas considered critical: poverty and inequality, because it feeds dissatisfaction; public security; migration and energy security. These points would be of immediate concern of governments and of the Latin American population and in this case, would represent an easier path for the US to regain its influence (CFR 2008).

This strategy would lessen the growing distrust of the Venezuelan population, Bolivia and Ecuador on the United States as

the overall distrust regarding the US has allowed the Presidents Hugo Chavez from Venezuela, Evo Morales from Bolivia and Rafael Correa from Ecuador, and even Felipe Calderón from Mexico, to try to increase their popular support with their criticism against Washington (CFR 2008, 7).

10 The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) is defined as an independent organization and formed by a group of experts and publisher dedicated to serving as a source of ideas for government officials, corporate executives, journalists, students, religious and civic leaders and others interested in understanding the options for US foreign policy and other countries. Founded in 1921, the CFR publishes the journal known as *Foreign Affairs*, the most relevant one in international affairs and foreign policy of the United States (CFR 2008).

For the authors of this Report, the anti-American policies of President Chavez should be taken seriously by the United States. The failure of the United States and the isolation of certain nations would reduce their influence, while, unwillingly, would strengthen the regimes of these countries, as the Cuban experience previously proved (CFR 2008, 75).

If the Americans also wanted to prevent Hugo Chávez from turning into a victim, or a second Fidel Castro, according to Bandeira (2003), the Clinton administration preferred to avoid political and economic costs at the national and regional levels, and took the attitude of wait and see. However, in the following years, the events that the report wanted to avoid took place: Ecuador and Bolivia elected progressive governments, Mercosur was recovered as an important part of regional integration and two new important blocks were created the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the South American Regional Integration Infrastructure Initiative (IIRSA).

Even with the end of bipolarity in the 1990s and the influence of China and Russia on the international stage, the United States continued to play a leading role in international relations. For Pecequillo (2012), neither the United States declined enough to make way for a new hegemony, nor did the new powers amount to take their place. The type of order that was built generated a peculiar political and economic interdependence, mutual vulnerability situations and a contradictory sharing of US interests with their challengers.

The presence of the Chinese and of their investments was also taking place fast. China's presence in Latin America has been gaining momentum in recent years, with investments averaging about \$ 10 billion a year in several countries, with a significant presence in many sectors and industries, particularly in oil, mining and infrastructure. ECLAC (CEPAL) data indicate that

China already is the second main destination of imports from the region and the third main destiny of its exports. Between 2000 and 2014, its share on regional exports raised from 1 to 9% (in 2013 it reached 10%), and at the same time its share on imports grew for a little over 2% to 16%. Due to this, in 2014, China and the European Union (EU), almost had the same share in the trade of goods with Latin America and the Caribbean and the world (12,4% and 12,5%, respectively). Even though still is the second main market for regional exports, only behind the US, since 2010 China has surpassed it as the second main source of imports, also behind this nation (CEPAL 2015, 37).

China's and Latin America approach was silent, fast and cautious since it is the US sphere of influence (Visentini 2014). Probably the United States monitor this approach with concern.

The strategies of the United States in the last two decades are grouped into three main areas that would be the Engagement & Enlargement (1994), the Preventive Doctrine (2002) and the Obama Doctrine (2010) (Pecequillo 2012). For Latin America, the US stance was defined at the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative (IA), launched by President Bush in 1990, that proposed the creation of a hemispheric free trade zone; the Free Trade Agreement of North America (NAFTA) between the United States, Canada and Mexico entered into force in 1994; and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) started its talks at the same year, without success. However, these initiatives, after completing more than two decades, were not expanded (Visentini 2011).

The use of force, support for coups and falls of governments are part of US strategies that remain, to a lesser extent and intensity. Complaints against these practices are even made by US own agencies. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) publicly denounced what the CIA had quietly done for decades (Gaudichaud 2015). Sometimes, there are official documents that become public, through the WikiLeaks platform, such as the ones showing the financing of the Venezuelan opposition by the United States since the beginning of Hugo Chavez government in 1998 (Johnston 2014). Experts in the field analyze the US involvement in the region and conclude that the main US leaders took prior knowledge of the events. This was the case of the Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet and George W. Bush Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who were aware of the preparations to overthrow President Chavez in 2002 (Bandeira, 2014).

From the point of view of the security agenda, the United States considers that Latin America faces no immediate major risks in terms of the expansion of terrorism and the threat of armed conflicts (Ayerbe 2008). This American perception does not mean, however, the withdrawal from the military bases in the region. Maintaining US military presence has been, for at least two decades, justified by the fight against drugs. This reasoning allowed the US to implement one of the largest financial aid programs to a single country, the controversial Plan Colombia. The United States maintains active military operations in the Latin American continent, which is currently directed by the US Southern Command of the US Defense Department to operationalize the political and strategic decisions for Latin America and the Caribbean¹¹. The Southern Command operates in two main areas: the South-

11 It is a Combined Command composed of Army elements, Navy, Air Force and Marines, in addition to representatives of the State Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), Coast Guard and Customs, with an approximate total of 850 men and women of the three armed forces and 130 civilians.

ern Cone with the objective of “preparing the armed forces for peacekeeping, democratization, professionalization of the armed forces and strengthening national security”; and the Andean Arch, in order to “fight against drugs, democratization, the professionalization of the armed forces and the combat of transnational threats.” (Abreu 2002, 14).

Nowadays, there are two “Forward Operating Locations (Forward Operating Locations - FOL)” under the Southern Command: Rainha Beatrix / Hato (Aruba / Curacao) and Comalapa (El Salvador). There was a third base, located in Manta (Ecuador), but it has been disabled due to the refusal of President Rafael Correa to renew the lease, creating another point of friction with the United States as signaled earlier. The alternative to the United States was to negotiate with Colombia and Chile. If Manta was still in the US control, it would have meant the presence and monitoring of airspace in Latin America and the Caribbean, including part of Brazil, especially the Amazon region, from these three bases (Abreu 2002).

From the point of view of ideological campaigns by the United States, the export of democracy and its liberal values has been one of the major US foreign policy agendas for the world and, consequently, for Latin America (Castro 2014). Based on this speech, the United States find themselves in the right to interfere and comment on the domestic politics of countries. An example was the recent election for the Venezuelan Congress discussed above. Immediately after the proclamation of the victory of the opposition against Maduro, John Kerry, the Secretary of State himself, expressed the satisfaction of his country with the result. In his words,

Venezuelan voters expressed their overwhelming desire for a change in the direction of their country. Dialogue Among all parties in Venezuela is Necessary to address the social and economic challenges facing the country, and the United States stands ready to support such a dialogue together with others in the international community (Kerry 2015).

As stated by Villa (2003), after the Cold War, the United States started to punish countries that adopted the principles of international governance similar to the ones of socialist countries, but that were enduring several difficulties to implement them. Therefore, US pattern of action of referring to interferences in other regions and countries justified by the rhetoric of “defending the oppressed peoples”, “promoting democracy”, “remove dictatorships” and “guaranteeing individual freedoms” remains (Santos e Teixeira 2015, Castro 2014).

Conclusion

The uniqueness of Chavez / Maduro, Rafael Correa and Evo Morales governments presents a historical significance for international politics, due to their focus on external relations focused on regional integration, the recovery of the control of the exploration of mineral and energy resources (some among the largest world), the approach with China and Russia. The United States, previously hegemonic, lost political spaces and are questioned about the attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of these countries.

These new strategies implemented by the three Andean countries are a result of domestic, and also historical, decisions in these societies, particularly Ecuador and Bolivia. From extremely poor countries with illiterate populations and no welfare state they transformed itself in nations that promoted a significant eradication of illiteracy, reduced social inequality and recognized the rights of ethnic minorities. Opposed to the rhetoric of repression of the opposition in these countries, these sectors have always been active, and participated and were being defeated in electoral elections. At the same time, they were organizing and sponsoring protests and attempted coups of State.

Sixteen years later, the three governments remain in power after several elections. In the last two years, however, they are showing signs of weaknesses in internal politics, opening the space for the questioning of the future of foreign policy if they were to leave the government. The first conclusion is the possible reversal of a sovereign foreign policy that these governments have adopted, particularly in relation to the United States. These varied oppositions represent closer interests with the US, harmed by economic policies. Constitutional mechanisms, created and approved by society, such as the Plurinational law, however, may be an obstacle to the return of those prior political conditions.

Another conclusion of this article is the importance of the ideological issue as a category of action, for projects and for the judging of the several diverse government projects and foreign policy adopted. The relationship with the United States, the nationalization of mineral resources and the option of integration and South-South cooperation without the usual pragmatism can be explained by the ideological dimension. This issue, however, deserves further research in relation to the left-right continuum for the understanding of the adopted projects. The political culture and the ideological question of each country matter to the understanding of international politics and external relations of a region. These are not mere relations amongst national States, but they represent interests that are articulated in the national and international level. The national policy of the last two decades in Venezuela, Ecuador and

Bolivia constitute an example of how domestic decisions affect the international scene and define the foreign policy to be adopted. They represent a reality full of examples regarding on how the ideological struggle is still a decisive factor in the understanding of the international political movements. In some extent, the actual multipolarity in international relations is the result of these countries internal decisions.

Last but not least, one can notice the narrow interdependence of the political stability amongst these Andean countries. Gradually, it becomes clearer that decisions or events that change the direction of domestic policy (and external) of a given country in the region will lead to reactions in the others. An emblematic example was the protest journey of 2015 in Ecuador. Unlike previous ones that were equally strong and organized, the latter had consequences in destabilizing the Correa government. The explanation for the change is not only related to an expected internal wear of a government that is re-elected, but also to the unfavorable situation that the neighboring governments of Maduro in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia, were facing at the time.

Finally, this analysis reinforces the need to comprehensively understand the functioning of the political culture of nations and its relation to foreign issues. Both the United States and the Andean societies have values and beliefs which are expressed in support guidelines and motivations for political action. To deal with these dimensions altogether is not simple, but it can be useful for understanding the relevance of issues such as democracy, participation, freedom, nationalism, autonomy, solidarity, independence in each of these societies. These dimensions help to understand the level of involvement and understanding of the society in the definitions of the foreign policies of their countries. Public opinion is an important part in the outcome of the national and foreign policy decisions, given their interdependence. Indeed, the governments with the leftist stances that were analyzed here and the frictions and conflicts with US interests may involve a detachment of the national community with the United States. In this sense, this understanding supported the analysis of the recent crisis in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia and its effects on the foreign policy and on the international politics of each and the region.

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the recent foreign policy of the Andean countries, Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, considering the relationship with the United States and the situation of political crises in these countries. We discuss the national context of each country and the consequences for external relations and international politics of each and of the region. We address United States interests in the effects of the current crisis in the three countries and highlight the importance of political culture for understanding reality.

KEYWORDS

Foreign Policy; Andean Countries; United States.

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