

EVOLUTION OF BRAZILIAN GEOPOLITICAL THOUGHT: ELEMENTS FOR A CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS IN SOUTH AMERICA

Luiz Pedone¹

Giordano Bruno Antoniazzi Ronconi²

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the evolution of Brazilian geopolitical thought on the region, aiming to create a theoretical framework on contemporary South America. We argue that if Brazil wants to enhance its leadership in the South American regional integration process, the country would have to harmonize neighbor States interests found in two main geopolitical components: the Bolivian heartland and the Amazonian heart. In order to reach the definitions of such concepts, this article analyzes the formation and evolution of Brazilian geopolitical thought, highlighting the geographic and political variables which underlie the stability in the region and provide the integration possibilities of South American countries. This will be the first part of the article, a historical approach to contextualize South American developments in its current geopolitics and a review of the main theoretical contributions of Brazilian authors in the last century. Once the geopolitical trends are assumed, the next section presents some principal elements for a current regional integration analysis in South America and what Brazil can do in terms of geopolitics. We believe that contextualizing these elements will strengthen our argument that harmonization of interests in these two main geopolitical realms will increase Brazil's regional leadership.

Palavras-chave: Regional Integration; Brazilian geopolitics; South America.

¹ Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Niterói, Rio de Janeiro - RJ, Brasil. lpedone@uol.com.br

² Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Niterói, Rio de Janeiro - RJ, Brasil. giordano.antoniazzi@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to understand South American regional integration processes under a geopolitical vision? This paper addresses the evolution of Brazilian geopolitical thought on the region, aiming to create a theoretical framework on contemporary South America. With this effort, it will be possible to indicate the development of an internal geopolitical understanding of Brazil and South America and, therefore, provide some elements for a contemporary analysis (KACOWICZ, 2000; CHILD, 1979). From this combination of elements, we argue that Brazil would have to harmonize neighbor States interests found in two main geopolitical components in the region in order to enhance its leadership in regional integration: in the Bolivian heartland and in the Amazonian heart. These two components are no new concepts, but rather the result of an intense geopolitical discussion which dates from the early twentieth century.

The first component deals primarily with the Brazilian historical attempt to expand to the West, that is, to reach the Pacific and benefit from its commercial and economic relations (FRIEDMAN, 2009). However, despite this geopolitical effort aiming at improving Brazil's geopolitical position, many geographical and political barriers have hindered such movement (COSTA & VLACH, 2007). The second component received attention only in the recent decades due to the geographical complexity and sociopolitical situation of the Amazon. The increasing economic importance of the Brazilian Amazon attracted its neighbors in trade and infrastructure initiatives, and was recently legitimized within the regional integration discourse³. Thus, supported by the development of the Brazilian geopolitical academic works, we can contextualize the dynamics of power in the South American region and better understand current challenges and opportunities for Brazil.

This article analyzes the formation and evolution of Brazilian geopolitical thought, highlighting the geographic and political variables which underlie the stability in the region and provide the integration possibilities of South American countries. To perceive this evolution, it is important to set aside the deterministic character perceived in twentieth

³ The Amazon stretches from Bolivia to the Guyanas. Since most of the Amazon is inside Brazil, it is important to differentiate Continental Amazon (also called Pan-Amazon) from Brazilian (also called Legal) Amazon. For an initial comprehension of the geopolitical importance of the Amazon, see Lima, Fraga, Sammya, Alvez, & Silva (2014).

century Brazilian geopolitical theories. Doing so enables us to build new causal mechanisms present in a geographical and political regional reality that is changing in the twenty-first century⁴. A more realistic approach to analyze current geopolitics allows contextualizing South American regional developments in historical terms and understanding its current dynamics. This will be the first part of this article, followed by a review of the main contributions of Brazilian authors. Once the geopolitical trends are assumed, the next section presents some principal elements for a current regional integration analysis in South America and what Brazil can do in terms of geopolitics. We believe that contextualizing these elements will strengthen our argument that harmonization of interests will increase Brazil's regional leadership.

FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF BRAZILIAN GEOPOLITICAL THOUGHT

While discussing Brazilian theoretical concepts, a distinction between a deterministic and a more realistic view of contemporary geopolitics is required in order to understand its one-hundred-year-evolution⁵. The main reason lies on the fact that if applying traditional geopolitical analysis now, such framework would not properly explain current power dynamics of South American countries, an essential feature to comprehend any changes in the region understood as 'geopolitical'. In particular, it is difficult to apply automatically Ratzel, Kjellen or Mahan main concepts for the region without making any conceptual changes. For instance, we can take the idea of heartland and apply to South America, but not to reach the same conclusions that Ratzel came to: as we shall see, the

⁴ Institutions, internal politics and environmental changes are altering the character, but not the nature of geopolitics. These elements are fundamental to a more clearly understanding of the geopolitical situation in South America, without rejecting the importance of territory in geopolitical theory. In sum, territory and resources matters, but it is not the solely variable to grasp and determine the power relations in the region. A discussion about this idea is present in Deudney (1997) and about the importance of environment on geopolitical issues in Halden (2007).

⁵ We do not intend to analyze the different epistemologies of geopolitics, so that the proposal here is not to understand the processes in South America from a critical geopolitical view. This is because we agree with Haverluk, Beauchemin, and Mueller (2014) with the statement that critical geopolitics is anti-geopolitics, anti-cartographic and anti-environment. Faced with this rejection and the difficulties of the determinist view, the ontologically "realistic" option becomes suitable.

context shaped the concept, embodying new relations between power and territory. Also, accordingly, to Rivarola Puntigliano, the impact of changes on the region and the new economic and political dimensions that shape Brazil in the new century, impinges adaptations and transformations upon the geopolitical thinking, mainly to understand the recent processes of integration (PUNTIGLIANO, 2011).

National objectives outline the geopolitical actions of States, that need to operate in an international (and regional) environment of diverse constraints (MEARSHEIMER, 2002)⁶. Therefore, to establish a sound geopolitical framework, consistent with the current integration processes and external actions around Brazil, a theoretical vision is needed to encompass previous causal mechanisms stated by its geopolitical thinking and highlight that these notions are dependent on the events that they generate (BHASKAR, 2008). Simply put, a relation between power and territory sets out a dynamic that alters that same relation, modifying States geopolitical objectives. Consequently, this assumption leaves out the positivism on the deterministic theory and provides a continuous evolutionary application of modifying old theories into new realities. In addition, it can continuously generate new knowledge about the region, having as premise the idea of continuous change in the variables and its theoretical framework. For these reasons, it is necessary to understand the evolution of the main geopolitical thinkers in the South American continent, which will allow us to contextualize the current geopolitical reality. As a result, it is conceivable to display the potential causal tendencies of key geopolitical variables in the South American continent and propose the interpretation of *harmonization of regional interests* to explain and to prospect integration processes on the region.

The South American geopolitical reality initially constructed its theoretical elements within the practical experiences of territorial demarcation in Brazil in the early twentieth century. Different border conflict resolutions in this period are seen exemplarily in the diplomatic conduction by Baron of Rio Branco, Brazilian minister of Foreign Relations. Although there was no geopolitical theoretical framework developed at his time, realistic foundations guided the conduct of his foreign policy in the period. The diplomat's political conduction and actions (internal and external) represented the basics of geopolitics: the perception of potential

⁶ However, despite epistemological similarities, it is important not to confuse with ontological realism presented in the previous paragraphs.

opponents in territorial issues; the strengthening of Brazilian Navy to maintain its presence in disputed areas; and the formal delimitation of border territories (HEINSFELD, 2011). Later on, authors such as Mario Travassos and Everardo Backheuser used the concepts and theories, especially of Ratzelian extraction, to compose the geopolitical features in the South American region. Moreover, during this period, military intellectuals developed these German ideas (despised and isolated by Brazilian civil scholars), institutionalizing geopolitical knowledge about the country (MARTINS, 2009). This also served as a theoretical framework for Brazilian aims to develop its economy and its international projection in the military regime between 1964 and 1985. International historical context strongly shaped the thinking of this generation of geopoliticians, who lived a period of border resolutions (such as the incorporation of Acre as part of Brazil), state centralization led in 1930 by Getúlio Vargas and distrust of the Argentine development and its possible expansion (ALSINA JR., 2014).

As previously stated, Backheuser conceptual production on geopolitical knowledge was oriented to the domestic territory. The idea of National Central Nerve is the author's conception of how States could politically centralize its decisions within a federally autonomous national territory (ANSELMO & BRAY, 2002). Since in that moment Brazilian politics was characterized on strong oligarchical politics in federate states such as São Paulo or Minas Gerais, this initial conception shows the firsts geopolitical concerns about internal strengthening of the State. Backheuser represented the geopolitical organicist determinism, because he saw the State, associated with the territory and society as an inevitable form of organism that permits the development of the whole country. It was an important influence for the military in later decades (SCHWAMBAIRD, 1997).

However, it was Mario Travassos that developed Brazilian goals in a clearer geopolitical model in the 1930s, comprehending internal problems and external threats. First, he outlined the main geopolitical influences to think Brazil in current South America: United States to the north and Argentina to the south, one representing an international and the other a regional threat. Travassos saw that United States influence in Central America had consolidated after building and controlling the Panama Canal (1903-1914). Economic "Yankee infiltration" in Andean roads and the Pacific Coast motivated the authors uneasiness about

Northern South America: only a continental projection of Brazil could halt these movements (TRAVASSOS, 1935). This idea of projection could be analyzed using the notion of lines of least resistance, understood as places where the implementation of infrastructure is easier and cheaper. Geographical antagonisms, that is, the geopolitical differences between the Atlantic and Pacific countries (geographically divided by the Andes) and between the basins of the Rio de la Plata and the Amazon (a not only resources-rich place, but also where the main river of the region flows) would give the locations of such lines. Given the premises that the States in the Pacific have the challenge of achieving access to the Atlantic to enhance its economic status, Brazil and Argentina, by having that access, have to control specific regions where trade occur. Following these concepts and different geographical locations, the position of such lines is situated mainly in Bolivia and, to a lesser extent, in Uruguay. Therefore, the main geopolitical reason for territorial expansion and conflicts between Brazil and Argentina throughout the centuries is because of the particular geographical position of these smaller states.

Travassos' contributions are fundamental to the formation of a national thought about Brazil's geopolitical action, because it was not an arms race that would dominate the region, but an infrastructural one. Bolivia is located between these major geological accidents in South America (the Andes, which separates the continent from the eastern plateaus and highlands and the western coast, and the basins of the Amazon and La Plata rivers, which promote a division between north and south), occupying a key strategic area for trade and primary production. More specifically, Santa Cruz de La Sierra (Amazon influence), Cochabamba (Andean influence) and Sucre (Platine influence) are the Bolivian cities that condition a "strategic triangle", included the mining towns of Oruro and Potosí and several pathways to the Pacific (TRAVASSOS, 1935). According to Travassos, only by analyzing this region that Brazilian and Argentinean interests about economic dominance and confrontations become visible: Cochabamba integrates the platinum rail system (most of them Argentinean) and Santa Cruz is seen as a key access point to Brazilian Midwestern states. This Bolivian triangle ends up being the center of gravity of border interests, involving both conflicts between Chile and Peru, and with Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil since the colonial period (CASTRO, 2012).

With these propositions, Travassos concluded with several

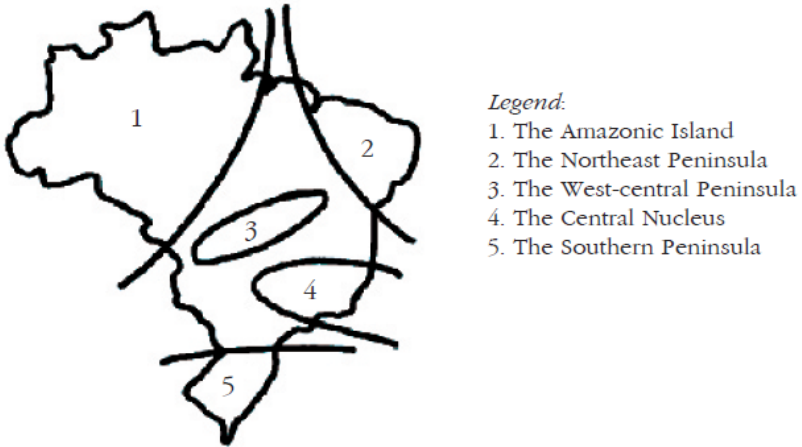
policy recommendations, the main one being that Brazil should ensure its connection with the Bolivian triangle through a system of railway connections, thus integrating all countries in the area at the expense of isolating Argentina (TRAVASSOS, 1935). We can find evidence that his ideas strongly influenced president Getulio Vargas (1930-1945) in his initial articulation of plans to build infrastructure, including highways between the Brazilian city of Corumbá and Santa Cruz de La Sierra in 1938 (MARTINS, 2011). Thus, in this period Bolivia became the containment of the Argentine railway expansionism and also helped promoting Brazilian geographical development. For that reason, his contributions paved the way for a new geopolitical thinking of South America and Brazil's possible actions in the region, considering the continent as the main object of any future geopolitical analysis.

Nonetheless, the external constraints posed by the Cold War in the 1960s, together with the institutional centralization by the military in Brazil, left out regional integration to focus on the idea of Brazil as a global power in geopolitical thought. The authors of this period form what would be later called the Brazilian Geopolitics School and gave much more emphasis on an international, and specifically, hemispheric positioning of the country (ALBUQUERQUE, 2010). This conception of international projection is rooted in Golbery do Couto e Silva ideas, in which Brazil would serve as a strategic support for the United States in the bipolar confrontation against communism in the American continent, mainly responsible for the hemispheric security in the South Atlantic⁷ (FREITAS, 20014). General Golbery was a major influence in the Brazilian geopolitical thought, by establishing national security and development as interdependent variables, critical to the Brazilian State expansion goals. This should be achieved by the fact that in the mid-twentieth century, the author saw Brazil as a "geopolitical archipelago" (as Figure 1 shows), whose areas needed to be incorporated as a whole to truly form the Nation. He understood that only when this process was completed and its surroundings were secured, Brazil could "offer its potential" to be recognized by Western countries as a global power (SILVA, 1981). Despite his political and ideological assumptions, the essence of his ideas - the unification of different national territories -, was sought after by the

⁷ In the Military Regime (1964-1985), General Golbery do Couto e Silva would become one of the main thinkers of the National Security Doctrine and would have a large influence in the political decision process in the 1970s.

military regime and opened new ways of economic and social mobilization (increased migration, industrial growth, and agriculture expansion in new areas).

Figure 1 – The Brazilian Archipelago



(Source: M. Romero, M. Vyoleta, R. Peña and P. Ulloa, 'Brasil: raíces geopolíticas y actual influencia en expansión', *Política y Cultura*, primavera 37 (2012), p. 244)

Couto e Silva's ideas persisted through the entire military regime and were supported by other geopolitical considerations from his fellow contemporaries. For instance, Therezinha de Castro, along with Delgado de Carvalho developed in the 1950s the theory of confrontation, a thesis to determine the limits and claims of South American countries in the Antarctica and Brazil's role to gain influence in the passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean (CASTRO, 1976). According to her, a regional consolidation of the South Atlantic would be only feasible with the recognition of the Antarctic continent, since Brazil's large proportion within this territory would increase its influence over the Strait of Drake. With this, Castro made a great contribution to geopolitical thought when she highlighted the importance of the relationship among South America, Africa, and Antarctica as essential to increase the influence over the South Atlantic (PENHA, 2008). Also Therezinha de Castro's contributions about South America aimed to indicate the

dualism between the countries on the Pacific coast (more regional circulation) and those on the Atlantic (intercontinental traffic), and the fact that they are situated in distinct longitudinal areas (one formed by the Andes and the other over the plains and plateaus). With this physiopolitical approach, resembling Travassos ideas, but focusing on geographical formations of the South American region, it qualifies the argument of a natural positioning of Brazil conditioning political conjunctions (or disjunctions) with other subregions, as well as in the Atlantic Ocean (CASTRO, 1995).

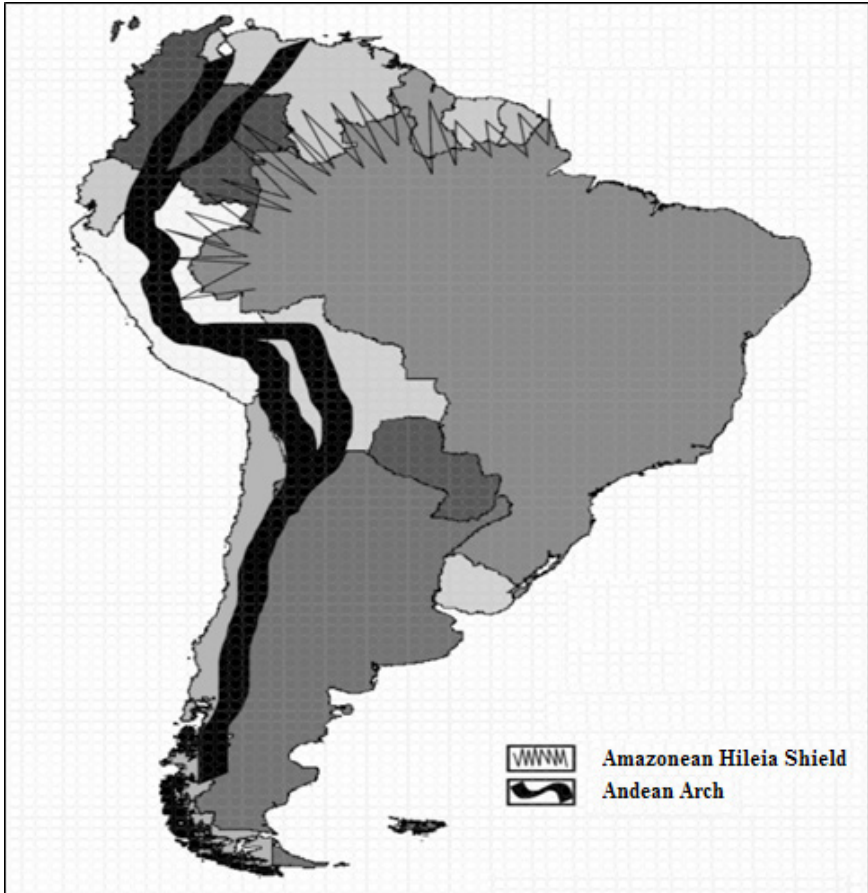
Carlos Meira Mattos, another author of this Brazilian geopolitical school, developed his thinking by gradually leaving aside the initial idea of Brazil as a world power, to focus on a more regional basis⁸, which would require the formation of a Pan-Amazonian identity. Thus, he emphasized the idea of inner poles of exchange as key variables to promote integration in the continental Amazon (MATTOS, 1984). In short, this concept emphasizes the State presence in major Amazonian cities to increase commercial and productive activities, transforming them into attraction poles to other foreign cities in the borders. The evolution of his traditional thinking is the result of incorporating sociological, anthropological and epistemological thoughts: power could be obtained in a territory with distinct political, economic and sociological characteristics and be applied in a geopolitical manner. However, like Couto e Silva and Castro's recommendations, a strong State would be necessary to mobilize resources in a national scale to achieve these objectives.

Thus, it is interesting to note this epistemological transition in the development of the geopolitical school. The current determinism at the beginning of the century did not fully grasp the new geopolitical reality and ideologically confined any divergent position. What happened was a desynchronization of reality and theory. Likewise, a further fragmentation of the Brazilian geopolitical thinking became evident in the 1980 and 90s. With little discussion of previous ideas, other epistemological pathways, such as critical geopolitics or a post-modern rejection of power and territory as an

⁸ Meira Matos, despite being a general influenced by the previous geopolitical ideas, was facing the current economic and political decline of Brazil in the late 1970s. This probably moved his attention to other geopolitical areas previously less studied. More on this shift in geopolitical thinking can be found in Kacowicz (2000).

area of study, were incorporated (KACOWICZ, 2000). Conversely, Moniz Bandeira works at the end of this period highlighted the new geopolitical movements of the post-Cold War as critical to contextualize the importance of South America to countries like USA or China: transfer of military and economic resources to Colombia in order to fight narcotrafficking, the FTAA proposal, activation of the US Fourth Fleet in South Atlantic. and Chinese investments in various countries are prominent geopolitical points (BANDEIRA, 2009). These actions created a revival in the geopolitical thought and its relation to the knowledge of Political Science and International Relations: geography and territory matter but there are more factors for a contemporary analysis (MIYAMOTO, 2014). Also, the absence of practical political subject in the post-modern geopolitical theories generated an academic reaction, by elaborating new insights and theories of applied regional geopolitics (ALBUQUERQUE, 2010). The awareness of new internal and external political issues would be critical to geopolitically situate Brazil in the South America of the twenty-first century. These discussions created the “new basis” for debating geopolitics in Brazil and its environment, putting emphasis on regional geography and the external policy of its prominent poles.

As stated, this reorganization of power in the twenty first century in any way rules out geopolitical elements, essential for an analysis of global trends and threats. As George Friedman stated, demographic, technological, and cultural changes will define the new geopolitical relations of the century and, if Brazil keeps itself isolated from the Andes and the dense Amazon forest frontier, as shown in Figure 2, it will be not a “geopolitical problem” for the United States (FRIEDMAN, 2011). This capture of “carelessness” by American geopolitics in the region was noted by Brazilians like Andre Martin and Edu Albuquerque. These authors state that new concepts, visions and theories are needed to deal geopolitically with the Amazon and advance policy recommendations, since it is of utmost importance for the development of the country and the region (ALBUQUERQUE, 2014).

Figure 2 – Andean Isolation of Brazil

(Adapted (translated) from E. Albuquerque, 'A (Geo)Política de Defesa Brasileira', *Revista de Geopolítica* 1/1 (2010), p. 53)

Although conflicts and border disputes in the Southern Cone region were reduced due to the integration phenomenon initiated in mid-1980s, a sharp recovery and updated form of geopolitical thinking on the Amazon region was developed, especially after the growth of an environmentalist discourse limiting and constraining national sovereignty on the vast Amazonian territory (PENNA FILHO, 2015). An updated geopolitical view on the issue can be represented by Bertha Becker interpretations on the Amazon, summarized here in three propositions: the articulation of the urban complex with green complex; the use of environmental services for

the development of the region; and innovation with respect to mining and its trade flow (BECKER, 2005). The first point arises from the need to avoid the productive isolation of this huge region and foster a differentiated innovation: to create a real urban network among the cities as a way to structure a supply chain based on local resources. In Becker's words:

Moreover, the rich territorial diversity orients a varied network of cities guided by different natural resources that should be considered as complementary. Roughly speaking, in a macro-regional level, the Amazon Forest (AF) is an extensive area led by Manaus under the influence of São Paulo. Belém guides much of Amazon without the Forest (AwF), located in the state of Pará, and its area of influence is reduced by the advance of the Brasília-Goiânia and São Luís action. Cuiabá commands the extensive savannah and the transition to the forest, extending the influence of São Paulo on the Amazon Forest. It is the contact area between the AwF and AF that originates conflicts of ownership and use of land, impeditive to the implementation of a new development model. (BECKER, 2009)

From this development, the increasing value of services produced by nature, using them as a basis for science and innovation, and the reversal of the regional settlement process takes large geopolitical importance (PAIVA, 2015). Consequently, these city networks can be understood by what Becker calls flexible armor belts of the core forest: while protecting nature (and, consequently, its economics), they can be used to promote development and innovation. Related to the second and third point, and due to intensified bioproductive process chain, it stimulates the deployment of industries (concentrated in areas without forest) and environmental services (more concentrated in areas of dense forest). As such, her conclusions recognize the strategic importance of providing unique products and services demanded by other neighboring countries. Under such a planning and articulation, the Brazilian city of Manaus would be an international and regional dynamic center. Since this city is centered on the largest basin of the world, equidistant from the major South American cities of the north, its pivotal position becomes clear to Brazilian objectives to articulate this new economic and trade process in

the region.

Becker's work shows that the new urban and economic processes taking place in the Amazon could potentially become a South American "centrifugal core": it can attract the countries in this region due to diverse economic possibilities. The insertion of the mining and lumber production cities within this complex opens new doors to an infrastructure both to the east and to the west. It is, basically, a necessary institutional innovation in the region in order to achieve its geopolitical potential. Reinforcing the creation of export corridors, Brazilian Amazon states such as Amapá (the northern tip of Brazil), could become the "spearhead of economic and infrastructure attractiveness in the region to neighboring countries" and expand Brazil's commercial possibilities (SUPERTI, 2011).

It is important to highlight the fact that geopolitical views on vulnerabilities in the Amazonian borders end up incorporating many "foundational" assumptions about the Rio de la Plata Basin in the south (ALBUQUERQUE, 2010). Hence, the region takes the same analytical vision on geopolitics once only applied to the south, since there are visible global power projections in that region, as well as the growing threat of transnational crime (and its political use) on the borders (PAIVA, 2015). Nonetheless, these processes, involving the population internal and across borders movements in the Amazon countries, as well as the diversified economy in the territory, generate a different dynamic in its borders. The threats arising from drug trafficking cannot be generalized to a "containment policy" of the Amazonian borders, not because of the growing logistic budgets, but because they obstruct the development process of the Amazonian heart, as previously indicated by these new assumptions. As the current authors show, isolation in this region is not conducive to infrastructural development (circulation of trade and people). Therefore, the conduct of a coherent foreign policy containing these indicated issues seems to be the determining factor in attracting the Amazonian neighbors to the development possibilities and regional securities that "only Brazil could offer" (ROMERO, PEÑA & ULLOA, 2012).

REGIONAL COMPOSITION: ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS

As seen, the varied approaches of the Brazilian geopolitical thought provide us many dynamic elements on geopolitical movements in South America and show different policy possibilities for the country.

Travassos contributed to the analysis of a strategic triangle in the Southern Cone, indicating which points are of geopolitical importance to the rise (or decline) of South American countries. Meira Mattos, Therezinha de Castro and Golbery do Couto e Silva gave the geopolitical importance to the regions of the Amazon, South Atlantic and Antarctica. Also, an understanding of the evolution of geopolitics in South America is vital for the current analytical context. This implies translating the mentioned authors into the twenty-first century discussion, a work already placed by Bertha Becker for example, by advancing a profound analysis of the Amazon. Therefore, by combining the development of these ideas, it will be possible to understand the key elements of analysis in South America. A didactical way to do this is by dividing into the most important elements in the continent.

THE DIVERGENCES CONTAINED IN THE SOUTHERN CONE: NEW TRIANGLE, NEW ACCESS TO THE PACIFIC?

As previously stated, Argentina has always been a major geopolitical concern for Brazil and the reverse is also true (ESCODÉ, 2012). However, Argentine geopolitical thinkers find that the country takes extreme actions from time to time, making geopolitically contradictory positions (BUCHRUCKER, 1994). For them, a part of the explanation of Brazil gaining ground in the region could be explained by Argentina's losses and non-pragmatic actions on the international field. Thus, for some authors the low costs to internationally "misguide" would explain Argentina's relative power loss to Brazil in the last decades (ESCODÉ, 2009).

However, with regard to the geopolitical focus of Argentina, the Rio de la Plata region is clearly the main subject of concern still in present days. This will always be the region's geopolitical bargaining table, in which conflicts or litigations can increase or decrease (DORADIOTTO, 2014). Uruguay, before seen only as a buffer state, should now be understood as an important articulator of Brazil-Argentina relations: its strengthening can be seen as an alleviation of any concern to Argentina and enables some development possibilities to the northern countries, by giving them (indirect) sea access (BUZAN & WAEVER, 2004), as seen in figure 3. In return, Brazil can maintain its presence and economic expansion in the region without escalating any conflict. Also, Brazil's willingness to show

favorable actions to Argentine interests over the Malvinas is also another fundamental geopolitical gear that enables current friendly relations (BANDEIRA, 2012). The maintenance or possible advancement in these positions improves Brazilian bargaining power in the Southern Cone.

Figure 3 – The Rio de la Plata Region



(Source: Stratfor, 'The Geopolitics of Brazil: An Emergent Power's Struggle with Geography' (2012) available at: <<https://www.stratfor.com/sample/analysis/geopolitics-brazil-emergent-powers-struggle-geography>>)

The Rio de la Plata region is not only a geopolitical element to the Brazilian-Argentine relations, but it is also applicable to other countries in the basin. The solution of the Itaipu conflict through the advancement of Brazilian bargaining power was paramount to alleviate the rivalry between Brazil and Argentina, turning possible to further more robust cooperation agreements, such as MERCOSUR (LIMA, 2007)⁹. The La Plata river also

⁹ The conflict is the old dispute already discussed between Brazil and Argentina by the Rio de la Plata region, centered mainly on the political control of Paraguay and political links with Uruguay. This regional dispute was the most intense war in South America, formally called Paraguayan War (1864-1870). For more information on the Itaipu Agreement in the 1970s, see Lima (2007). For a discussion about this evolution on the Brazilian-Argentinean rivalry, see also Winand (2014). See also Pedone (1989) for the Itaipu binational Hydro-Power project, military power, development policy and insulated policy making.

becomes an important element of political bargaining (hydroelectric energy) with Paraguay, since new Itaipu agreements show distinct gains to both countries (BLANCO, 2009). Recent thinking about such issues argues that Brazil could stand out on its neighbor's development by facilitating access to the sea through its rivers. Such movement could, conversely, legitimize Brazilian access to the Pacific Ocean (through commercial agreements or infrastructural projects). Such a shift is due to the growing importance to Brazil of the Asian markets, enhanced by favorable political relations in the last decades (KING, MATTOS, et al., 2012).

The progressive strengthening of Eastern Bolivia shows the degree of continuous Brazilian presence in the country. The infrastructure developments, as well as investments in the soy area, do not question the geopolitical importance of Bolivia, but the framework presented by Travassos earlier, proposing a new possible triangle (Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and Tarija) due the presence of new strategic minerals (SEVERO, 2012). The intention to give Bolivia an access to the Atlantic through the activation of Puerto Busch (on the border with Paraguay) is a way to support the maintenance of the Brazilian presence in Santa Cruz de La Sierra and give the country an indirect access to the Pacific. This seems to be the way for Brazil to surpass the natural barriers of the South American continent presented earlier and to enhance its commercial activities within the region.

Since the Brazilian presence in the (old or new) strategic triangle has strengthened in the last decades, the priorities for Brazilian defense issues have increased in the South Atlantic, gaining now a special new term from the military, the Blue Amazon (WIESEBRON, 2013). The recent discoveries of large oil reserves in the Brazilian South Atlantic, combined with the geopolitical bases originated from Therezinha de Castro and Meira Mattos works, have been officially designed the South Atlantic as a strategic environment for the country (NEVES, 2015). Therefore, it is possible to distinguish a strategic surrounding and a defense area for Brazil, where the first requires diplomatic and economic actions to improve its geopolitical regional status, and the second implies a military modernization to protect its coastal resources at an international level (PAIVA, 2015).

PACIFIC COUNTRIES AND THEIR INHERENT INSTABILITY

The Pacific countries from Colombia to Chile have a different way of relating to the other South American countries, as already indicated by geopolitical thinkers so far. As the Andes hinders their relationship to the east and creates territorial and border conflicts, these Pacific countries showed little interest in enhancing a stronger economic relationship with Atlantic countries. Their unstable position can be highlighted by: commercial relations out of the region, mainly with Asia, the strategic relationship with the United States, the issue of drug trafficking and the rivalry with neighbors for an access to the Atlantic¹⁰ (SLIPAK, 2014). However, the current trend of large Chinese investment, especially on primary resources, such as oil and mining must be stressed. Such investments in Peruvian mining companies occurred in the last decade, while Ecuador receiving increasing attention from Chinese oil companies in recent years (CHEN & LUDENA, 2013). The country has important oil fields in the eastern Amazon areas and, by involving large Chinese financing to its economy, internal conflicts (between the Ecuadorian companies with large Chinese capital and its outsourced local workers) are becoming very common in nearby border areas with Colombia and Brazil (MARTÍNEZ, 2014).

Colombia and Venezuela still have territorial disputes, since the division of Gran Colombia in the nineteenth century (BETHELL, 2004; ALVES, 2000). The mutual distrust between Colombia and Venezuela ends up being the tensest South American conflict, due to the fact that both have the second and third highest military spending when compared to other countries in the region (INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES, 2015). The horizontal character of the Venezuelan geopolitical expansion (towards the Pacific) confronts the vertical constraints posed by the Andes on Colombia, causing an inherent tension on the borders of these countries (CETINA, 2010). Another important internal point to comprehend the current Colombian situation in the region is the development of internal infrastructure between the center and the north of the country which has not fully connected their cities. Hence, urban planning emerges as one of the main geopolitical factors needed for

¹⁰ These characteristics can be seen very clearly on the recent agreements made between Colombia and NATO (SANCHEZ, 2014).

the country to consolidate its productive capacity, facilitating to resolve conflictive areas where the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) are situated (DUSSAN, 2006). Therefore, Colombian geopolitical issues involve an a priori settlement of such internal affairs and disputes because they generate new external issues, especially against Venezuela.

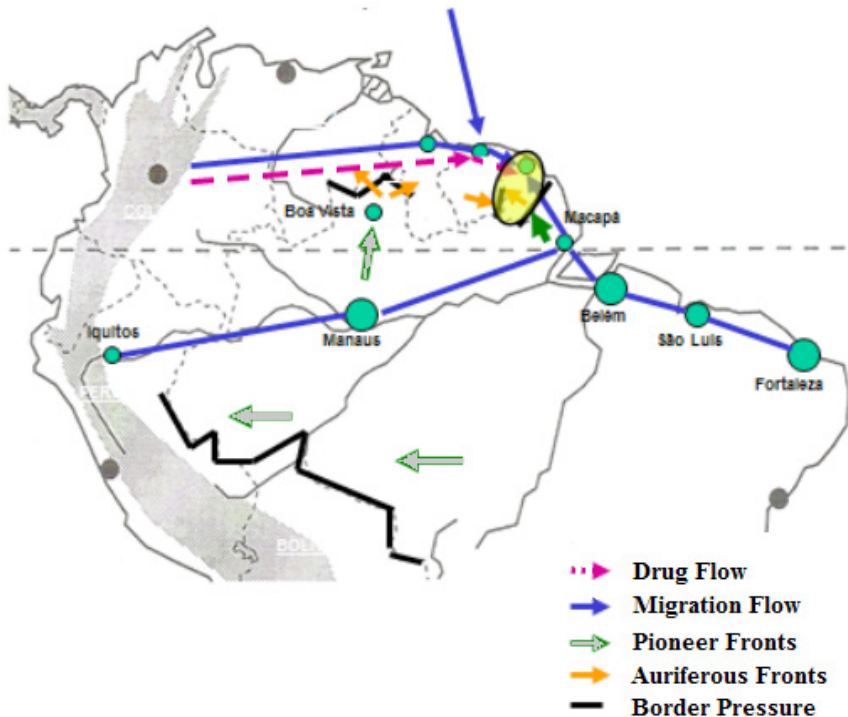
Perceptibly, it is because of the FARC and the drug trafficking that Colombia turns to the Amazon. Also for this reason, it is where direct foreign presence is more present: this Andean country has received a large sum of resources and military bases from the United States on its territory, especially in border areas (COSTA, 2009). Colombian internal instability prevents it from developing more concrete external actions. These problems spillover to the Amazon, escalated by their neighbor's distrust about intense U.S. presence in the territory (PENNA FILHO, 2015). Nonetheless, it is exactly from these problems that arise the opportunities for Brazilian presence, through the intensification of the Amazonian urban networks in the region and its military strengthening in the borders, as shown in the last decades (BITENCOURT; ARRARÁS & GAMARRA, 2002).

CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES AND THE ATTRACTION OF THE AMAZON

The geopolitical importance of the Amazon, as stated in previous sections, is clearly more connected to the Northern South American countries. The Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Venezuela, and Colombia can be seen as the countries that constantly measure the benefits of looking into and out of their continental surroundings. However, unlike the Pacific countries, they are related with their territorial neighbors and borders in a much more intense way. Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana can be understood as "another South America", where recent independence processes were interwoven with various internal conflicts and strong migrations to United States, Canada, with a large part to European countries during the end of last century (VISENTINI, 2010). These are countries that are still institutionalizing their political systems to conduct a more structured development of their society, reducing illegal activities such as drug trafficking and gold mining within borders. The political institutionalization, internal stability and growth of these countries upgrades their position vis-à-vis European countries with respect to their South American geographical integration (GRANGER, 2013).

This implies a new border orientation with these countries around the Brazilian Amazon, basically an intensification of what happened in the 1980s: large infrastructure projects involving Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana and Brazilian cities, from Manaus to Belém. For example, a recent agreement between Brazil and Guyana to build hydroelectric plants involves the construction of such plant in Essequibo, an area disputed by Venezuela (SILVA, 2015). It could be seen here as an offering of the Amazon border resources as a development element to neighboring countries, involving them more in the regional integration process (as seen in figure 4), at the same time it opens a bargaining space for Brazil to settle disputes between them and increase its regional leadership. Such bargaining actions are no policy innovations at all, in fact just a strategy applied from time to time whenever opportunities arise (ALSINA JR., 2014).

Figure 4 – Northern South America Dynamics



(Adapted (translated) from S. Granger, 'As Guianas e o Brasil da contenção à continentalização, ou perigos e vantagens de uma interface caribenha e europeia', *ACTA Geográfica* 7/15 (2013), p. 29)

On Venezuela, as previously stated, its horizontal geopolitical character (towards west) opens its options of commercial relations to the Southern Cone through the Amazon region and opening trade operations with China and United States through the Caribbean. With such options, the country could diversify its trading partners, through the strengthening of infrastructure channels for commercial relations with other members of Mercosur. This is strongly related to energy integration projects with countries south of the continent, such as Argentina and Bolivia, which could politically integrate or isolate Venezuela to participate (SLIPAK, 2014). On the one hand, any regional project enabling a stronger trade flow for Venezuela will inevitably pass through the Amazon. On the other hand, the strengthening of Caracas-Havana-Managua relations sets another way to reduce Venezuelan oil freight costs flowing to China (SCHENEGOSKI & ALBUQUERQUE, 2014). This “Caribbean triangle” was developed at the time that Venezuelan-Cuban relations began to have a more positive character, with the consolidation of institutions like the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA). Hence, ALBA created not only an ideological, but also a significant political and economic relationship, because it provided the exchange of materials and fundamental human resources for the economic reconstruction and institutional reform of their countries (ARCE & SILVA).

These elements indicate the chessboard of possibilities in South America, especially for Brazil, that can utilize its infrastructural investments to attract its regional neighbors. Combining material resources and diplomatic propensity for action seems to be a trend that can legitimize Brazil’s intentions as a regional leader in South America. In order to understand what these two actions currently represent and how can they geopolitically influence South America, it is important to capture the role of the IIRSA (Iniciativa para a Integração da Infraestrutura Regional Sul-Americana, in Portuguese or Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure of South America) and of UNASUR (Union de Naciones Suramericanas, in Spanish or Union of South American Nations) into our discussion.

THE MORAL AND PHYSICAL COMPONENT OF SOUTH AMERICAN GEOPOLITICS: UNASUR AND IIRSA

The Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA) represents both the regional geopolitical game previously discussed as well as possible trends related to productive

integration. Behind each axis of integration and development proposed by the Initiative (Figure 5), one can identify interests of countries concerned about their possible gains to their internal development. Evidences in recent years show that there is a growing interest in carrying out regional integration projects: an increase over 70% in the numbers of plans, and a four-fold increase in projects investment since 2004 (IIRSA, 2014).

Figure 5 – IIRSA Projects Axes



(Adapted (translation) from C. Hirst, 'O Papel do BNDES nas Políticas de Desenvolvimento e Integração Regional', *Espaço e Economia* 2/3 (2013), p. 4)

IIRSA projects can possibly create a web of supply chains among the countries involved and improve their economic interdependence. This idea is important because it demonstrates the strategic planning character from and for the South American region rather than externally imposed causes like in previous periods, particularly in the 1990s, where the idea of "open regionalism" dominated any related integration policy (COSTA, 2010). For some authors, IIRSA resembles the second phase of Travassos project because, when analyzing the configuration and management of such infrastructure projects keep the Brazilian expansion to the West at a regional level (MARTINS, 2011). Nevertheless, it is necessary to

emphasize that such expansion does not end when it comes to the South American Pacific shores. It is possible to say that the ultimate goal would be to build this infrastructure through regional integration, reaching out to Asian countries and markets (COSTA, MENGER & TANCREDI, 2015). Consequently, this regional integration initiative could be seen as the mean and not the end of Brazilian interests.

Regardless of the type of regionalism IIRSA seeks, there are clear geopolitical interests in the performance and implementation of these infrastructure projects that strengthen regional integration, and, consequently, the role of Brazil in South America and abroad. With these geopolitical components acting on behalf of a regional stabilization, there is a need to institutionalize this process, that is, to turn South America into a political entity with goals and regional principles in common. The exposed regional architecture has evolved considerably in the twentieth century with agreements such as the creation of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (1995) and of Mercosur (Mercado Comum del Sur, in Spanish, or Southern Common Market 1991). Therefore, it was possible to advance over the next century to the development of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) (ARENAS-GARCÍA, 2012). Hence, the legitimacy of UNASUR enables this integration, particularly infrastructural, throughout the continent (CETINA, 2010). The objectives of the organization do not reside only in the geographical terms discussed before, but also in the formulation of a common political identity, especially in the defense area. With specific councils for such subject (its Defense Council), managing conflicts within a consensual framework promotes transparency among members and further legitimizes the institution (VIGEVANI & RAMANZINI JR., 2010).

While UNASUR geopolitical role has become more evident in the last years, the influence of the Organization of American States (OAS) has diminished since the late 1990s. The idea of governance by UNASUR has been effectively applied in order to create transparency and settle pending disputes through its regional defense council (FLEMES, 2011). Hence, consensual hegemony could be achieved by Brazil, if the country sustains such regional institutionalization (BURGES, 2008). However, as seen before, a necessary condition for this to happen is the stabilization (or, in some cases, the maintenance) of the geopolitical regional situation. Also, competition with other regional organizations, like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, are additional external constraints on Brazil's performance

(NOLTE & WEHNER, 2012). The presence (or absence) of Brazilian diplomatic, commercial or productive actions directly affects the directions regional integration and, consequently, UNASUR can take.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE REGIONAL TRENDS: GEOPOLITICAL HARMONIZATION AND INTEGRATION PROCESS

Having developed the Brazilian geopolitical thought on the South American reality, it is important now to highlight main geopolitical trends and properly conceptualize them. An appropriate contextualization of the evolution of Brazilian geopolitical thinking and its changing reality in the twenty-first century has still focused on some key areas and perceptions. From this literature review and current regional geopolitical contextualization, two central structural components make possible comprehension of the Brazilian development objectives, while at the same time they reinforce regional integration. These are the infrastructure in the Bolivian heartland and in the Amazon heart. Harmonization of these two components has been a key action that Brazil has taken to enhance its regional integration process.

Brazilian geopolitics always focused on the first component, the Bolivian heartland, since this was where the regional balance of power was decided with Argentina, through numerous regional disputes. Thus, conflict management and diplomatic conduct were fundamental to develop, step by step, a bargaining dynamic among Southern Cone countries. From regional wars to greater economic interdependence, Brazil has managed to stabilize the region and obtained many benefits by maintaining its indirect presence in the heartland, leading a deeper regional integration in recent years. Rising its interests towards Asia, Brazil's priorities became securing and enhancing its commercial possibilities concerning the West through infrastructural projects in this heartland.

With the greater prominence of the Amazon heart, since the mid-1970s its discussion in Brazil has dramatically increased. Therezinha de Castro already indicated the Amazon Basin as a connecting sub-region between the Caribbean and the Bolivian highland areas, considering a possible heartland of the continent (CASTRO, 1995). However, unlike the first concept, geopolitical relevance is placed upon specific points and cities on the large Amazonian territory, not on a large region of interest. Consequently, it is more about connecting the dots than to reach them,

since this last movement has already been done in earlier decades. A new trend is to attract South American countries to the Amazon in order to participate in this new development as trade increases arising from infrastructural development in the region. Creating a network of cities and bioproduction around this core is an institutional innovation process, opening opportunities to promote development of that region (BECKER, 2009).

These two main South American geopolitical components attempt to contextualize the complex dynamic of the diverse regional elements, from old border disputes to new dynamics of economic relations to legitimate regional institutions. Having a critical view of current geopolitical evolution in South America, it is possible to derive from the relations of these elements and the scenarios for Brazil as a possible regional leader. Brazil's task of harmonizing geopolitical conflicts inherent to the region emerges at the same time it economically advances on these two regional fronts. As discussed before, contrary of being an obstacle it is a chance to step on an increasingly regional political integration, and to legitimize its leadership. Therefore, if there is a choice of managing geopolitical instability in the region under specific institutions, there is an element of regional order formally represented by UNASUR.

The study sought not to extrapolate to the international geopolitical context. However, a quick indication of the absence of geopolitical objectives of regional harmonization with its international projection is a missing theoretical connection in the twentieth century Brazilian geopolitical thought. It is becoming a consensus in the geopolitical discussion in Brazil that, in order to become a true international player, the country has first to be recognized as a leader in its region. The way to achieve these objectives will be, in geopolitical terms, through promoting regional stability, and therefore through the management of intraregional conflicts. Such stability on the continent facilitates investments in infrastructure, provided by regional agreements, and this opens space for a more intense economic growth. The current geopolitical analysis, placed under a critical view and dependent on the evolution of contemporary events, ends up becoming an essential tool for exploring the possibilities of these processes, avoiding vague deterministic predictions.

A EVOLUÇÃO DO PENSAMENTO GEPOLÍTICO BRASILEIRO: ELEMENTOS PARA UMA ANÁLISE CONTEMPORÂNEA NA AMÉRICA DO SUL

RESUMO

Este artigo aborda a evolução do pensamento geopolítico brasileiro na região, com o propósito de criar um arcabouço teórico sobre a América do Sul contemporânea. Argumenta-se que, se o Brasil deseja realçar sua liderança no processo de integração regional sul-americano, o país teria que harmonizar os interesses dos Estados vizinhos encontrados em dois principais componentes geopolíticos: o heartland boliviano e o coração da Amazônia. Para que se alcance a definição de tais conceitos, esse artigo analisa a formação e evolução do pensamento geopolítico brasileiro. Destacando as variáveis geográficas e políticas que subjazem à estabilidade na região e proporciona as possibilidades de integração dos países sul-americanos. Esta será a primeira parte do artigo, uma abordagem histórica para contextualizar os acontecimentos na América do Sul na sua geopolítica atual e uma revisão das principais contribuições teóricas de autores brasileiros do último século. Uma vez que as tendências geopolíticas são assumidas, a próxima seção apresenta os principais elementos para análise atual da integração regional na América do Sul e o que o Brasil pode fazer em termos geopolíticos. Acredita-se que a contextualização desses elementos reforçará o argumento de que a harmonização de interesses nesses dois campos geopolíticos principais elevará a liderança regional do Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Integração Regional; Geopolítica Brasileira; América do Sul

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