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## **The Russia-Latin America Nexus: Realism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*Simon Ciccarillo*

### **Introduction**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War in 1991, the United States has been the singular, preeminent power in the international system. Until that point, the US had invested heavily in relations-development with Latin America (to prevent countries from slipping into the sphere of influence of the USSR), successfully pacifying the region and removing foreign intervention – following the sentiment of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. However, after 1991, and with no serious threat to its hegemony, the US turned its unguided grand strategy to lofty liberalist ideals by pursuing humanitarian policies in Somalia and the Balkans under President Bill Clinton, and then fighting the “War on Terror” under President George W. Bush.

Recently, the US “Pivot to Asia” and continued focus on the Middle East has seen a continued lack of interest and policy activity in Latin America, due to a false sense of security of US hegemony in the region, according to American policymakers. While this has occurred, Russia under Vladimir Putin began its ascent on the international stage following the disastrous “lost decade” of the 90s by pursuing aggressive national interest policies in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Funded by huge energy revenues, Russia has been able to rapidly develop its military and technological capacities to begin taking a more significant role in the world, alongside China. This threat to US unipolarism has not gone unnoticed in certain regions of the world, but seems have eluded notice by the US in arguably the most important region for US security, Latin America.

Given current events in Eastern Europe (the Ukraine Conflict) and the Middle East (the Syria Conflict), as well as recent aggressive foreign policy trends towards Latin American countries, Russian interventionism can be better seen and analyzed. Recent Russian policy initiatives across Latin America have seen increased reciprocation by Latin American states to Russian advances in economic and political spheres. Both Russia and Latin America strive for increased economic prosperity and regional power, as well as a multipolar international system in which they could achieve these national interests. At the same time, the U.S. has continued to lack a serious presence in the region, assuming the security of its influence in Latin America. Realism, specifically the notions of geopolitics and national security, best illustrates these recent developments, and should be explored to understand how Russian intervention in Latin America could affect the future of the US and the world in the international arena, as well as the current shortcomings of US policy in the region.

## **Recent Events in Eastern Europe and the Middle East**

The increasing interest in Russia by Latin America today on topics ranging from increased food and arms deals to support for annexing Crimea and being critical of US foreign policy is related to events in the Middle East and Latin America, showing the effects of the globalized world today. The most important connection between the two regions, Russia and Latin America, is the nature of the school of international thought that make up Russian foreign policy in general – realism. In general, Russia's foreign policy can be characterized as an aggressive and nationalist-driven approach to what it sees as threats to its national sovereignty or the sovereignty of countries considered to be part of the Russian sphere of influence. In short, Russian policymakers today have not adopted new forms of thought since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but rather have adapted the same concepts of realist geopolitics to fit 21<sup>st</sup> century Russia without the ideological trappings of a Communist government.

The collapse of the Soviet Union left the belief of Russia's exceptionalism as a world superpower, as well as inherent mistrust of the West and its institutions (namely NATO) to drive its pragmatic, realist policies in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. For example, in 2008 in an effort to 'protect Russians' (Russian speakers and citizens), it engaged in a regional conflict with its neighbor Georgia in support of South Ossetia and Abkhazia—breakaway republics with Russian affinity and Russian ethnic minorities. While arousing criticism from Western countries that sought to bring Georgia closer to the European Union (another Western institution of which Russia is wary), it did not provoke the same response as Russian actions in Ukraine several years later. In 2014, the democratically elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich was toppled by Ukrainian protestors in another iteration of a 'Color Revolution,' or political upheavals against Russian-backed governments in former Soviet republics.<sup>1</sup> Russia was quick to act to maintain control of the situation despite protests from the West by siphoning off oil to Ukraine and hosting Yanukovich when he fled Kiev. This led later in the year to the annexation of Crimea by Russia, which justified the action with the 'defense of Russians' response, as well as citing historical, legal, and cultural ties with the region.

In the Middle East today, Russia has actively been engaged across the region, specifically in Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Russia supports the Bashar al-Assad government of Syria, which allows a Russian fleet to maintain a base in that country, while the Syrian government continues to combat moderate rebels and extremist Islamic groups such as the al-Nusra Front and ISIS. Recently Russia began airstrikes against ISIS and enemies of President Assad, while also sending elite units from its army to operate in the region, thus protecting its ally—Assad—as well as its extremely important and strategic military base in the Mediterranean. The Putin Administration was also influential in brokering a deal

with Iran regarding uranium enrichment for Iran's nuclear program, assisting in the creation of a compromise between Iran, the US, and other state actors, which satisfied all parties for the time.

Revived Russian activism within the past two years portrays a new Russia, intent on pursuing a policy that benefits its strategic and national interests, one of the most important of which is increasing its power relative to the United States, similar to the position of the USSR during the Cold War. What can be assumed by this concept, is that to the Russian government, hard power is still very much the means to an end, which is geopolitical dominance in an effort to solidify a position as a superpower, or as close to that role as is feasible for Russia at the moment. Unimpeded by socialist rhetoric, Russia is able to focus its military and economic might to achieving greater regional influence which one could argue it possesses over former Soviet republics, less developed regions, and even Europe to an extent, which has been slower than the US to condemn and act upon Russian assertiveness in Eastern Europe due to its relative economic dependence upon Russian energy.

However, in an effort to discourage aggressive policies pursuing national interests of Russia, the West has enforced tough economic sanctions and political isolation, even "excluding" Russia from the G-8. The US has also sent a contingent of American forces to reinforce NATO members in the Baltic States and Poland, provoking a strong response from Russia. NATO forces' increased training and naval reconnaissance missions around Russia's borders are where Latin America's strategic position begins to enter the context of events in Europe and the Middle East. Due to the already-imposed sanctions, Russia had begun to look for new economic opportunities to counter the negative impacts of a loss of markets in Europe. It also seeks political allies as a way to further justify its actions in Eastern Europe amongst members of the international community, as well as retaliate against perceived encirclement by NATO. This immediate foreign policy issue, combined with the realist policies Russian leaders possess to create a stronger Russia internationally makes Latin America an extremely effective outlet to perform everything the Russian government is seeking.

### **The US Perspective**

From 1823 on, when the Monroe Doctrine came into effect, the US effectively dominated the Latin American sphere as if it were a "backyard." Events such as the 1846 Mexican-American War, in which the US seized half the territory of the Republic of Mexico, was one of the first abuses of the Doctrine to that point, and alienated America's southern neighbor. Then in 1914, Theodore Roosevelt backed the Panamanian coup during a civil war in Colombia, resulting in the loss of the most strategic and economically valuable land to Colombia, while also provoking outrage across the region. From the 1920s onward, American interventions in

the Caribbean under Taft and future presidents peppered the history of US-Latin American relations, whereby the US often attempted to take some form of control over the economies of Latin America for its own development, such as William Walker's coup in Nicaragua, which resulted in economic submission to the US. Throughout the Cold War, similar ideologically inspired actions took place across South America as well. Unfortunately, these interventions have remained in the collective consciousness of Latin Americans today, especially after a decade of increased tension related to US border security and fair as well as free trade agreements with various countries in the region.

Latin America's shift toward Russia as a counterbalance to the US given increased autonomy is also due to the relative inactivity or lack of interest by American policymakers in the region. After the end of the Cold War, there was no apparent reason for the US to worry about the stability of its position in Latin America. The regimes there were for the most part favorable or at the very least, manageable, and economic opportunities continued to grow across the region for American companies. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the US completely refocused its strategy to react to the terrorist attacks coming from the Middle East, which saw a decade of devoted attention there. Recently, the Obama Administration has declared its "Pivot to Asia," while also beginning to focus somewhat on Eastern Europe, given Russia's activism, and the growing threat of ISIS. What this means, is that Latin America has received mixed messages from the US and its leadership.

During the Cold War and before, the Latin American region was quite important, and the US successfully pursued national interests there. Now however, Latin American leaders see the US almost completely ignoring the region, causing either confusion or the idea that greater autonomy is a necessity if Latin America wishes to prosper further. Due to American inaction, Russia has filled the power vacuum that has been left. At one point, Russia moved to fill the gap left by the US government in Colombia when it cut financial support to that country's military.<sup>2</sup> Russia has also been active in pushing for the inclusion of Brazil as a permanent member on the UN Security Council—something that has met with resistance and inactivity from the US.<sup>3</sup> Minister Lavrov, during his trip to the region in 2013, also tweeted that like Crimea, is rightfully a part of Russia, the Falkland Islands are rightfully a part of Argentina.<sup>4</sup> These examples of Russian activism have continued to foster the idea and sentiment in Latin America that Russia is a country that does and will continue to support the region and its autonomy from the US—which of course it will do, following realist principles. Due to this lack of activity on the part of the US, Latin American governments have been able to become closer to Russia, rather than seeing any great alternative offered by its northern neighbor.

The lack of US activity in Latin America has had a clear effect on people's opinions there, many of which are critical of US policies in general. The Pew

Research Center, which conducted a poll regarding the image of the US across the world, found that while there has been an increase of 7% in positive ratings (from 36% approval to 43% approval by Latin Americans in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, etc.), that Argentina has the lowest approval rating (at 43%) of American foreign policy, and the US in general in Latin America.<sup>5</sup> What is surprising is that Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, or any of the other core allies of Russia did not occupy this position. Rather, Argentina—a country that has historically been neutral with regard to the US and its policies—is starting to drift toward a more Russia-oriented camp in the region. Increased arms deals, economic agreements, and political maneuverings such as support or abstention in the UN-Crimea referendum, point to the pro-Russia trend occurring presently in Latin America. If this continues unchallenged and unchanged, autonomy will increase to a point when many countries in the region will see that cooperation with Russia reaps more results than being ignored by the US, causing the counterbalance to form against traditional US hegemony, and potentially even an unfavorable regional order in the future.

### **Russian-Latin America Relations**

The direction of Russian-Latin American relations are the most significant aspect of the dynamic shift occurring in the international system at the moment, yet an early period where much could still happen. If current trends of cooperation, trade, and exchange of ideas continue and increase, the process of multipolarization could speed up to a point when the US does not have nearly as much relative power 30 years hence, as it does now. Ideally for both Russia and Latin America, this world would instead have a more cohesive Latin American bloc (or nations) representing the region as a power, along with Russia in an alliance based on economic, political, or even cultural ties, and certainly on historical ones. The means to achieve this end characterize realism, which is the school of thought being used to analyze the relationship and international system currently. However, it is not easy or even necessarily assumed that Russia and Latin America will continue to mutually benefit from continued good relations unless both work intentionally to achieve a similar goal. Fortunately for both Russia and Latin America, the basis for making the realization of multipolarity and prosperity already exists.

In Latin America, Russia is able to fulfill major foreign policy goals, such as economic prosperity, increased regional and global influence, and the multipolar world that the first two might entail. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) reported that, “several Latin American countries have indicated their desire to increase exports to Russia to boost their own economies” demonstrating Latin America’s willingness to defy American and European calls for further boycotts on Russian products. Latin American countries have been

further incentivized to fill the trade gap in the Russian economy for mutual economic gain and development, at least in the short-term future.<sup>6</sup>

A willingness to partner with Russia in mutually beneficial trade already exists in Latin America, as the foundation for a deeper potential alliance. Core Russian political and economic partners in Latin America generally are in favor or have abstained from a decision regarding the annexation of Crimea and the Ukraine conflict, which strengthens and validates Russia's political position further. Additionally, as stated by Jan Burlyai, Deputy Director of the Latin American Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Russia, "the history of [Russia's] relations with Latin America began... two hundred years ago."<sup>7</sup> Ever since the independence of many Latin American nations in the early to mid 1800s (and even when they were colonies of Spain and Portugal), the Russian government in some form, be it the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, etc. saw the potential of Latin America as a place where Russia could pursue its desire for political and economic expansion and prosperity. Russia possesses a historical advantage over most competitors (like China) in the region, as it shares a long cultural and diplomatic past with Latin America, not characterized by the often harsh and fluctuating relationship between the US and the region.

Throughout the 1800s, the Russian Empire aligned with Latin American countries such as Argentina and Brazil, where flows of ideas from literature to science and technology characterized a generally positive economic and cultural relationship, characterizing the historical depth of interactions between the two regions.<sup>8</sup> Given that many Latin American nations had at the time recently become independent from Spain and Portugal, they were not significantly influenced by either colonizing powers—a trend that continues currently. Today, Spain and Portugal only maintain a shallow set of economic relations with their former colonies. This lack of influence left the region open to a vacuum largely filled by the US, but also by Russia in a more subtle but longer-lasting way. For example, in the early 1900s, waves of Russian immigrants began arriving in Argentina, Brazil, and a handful of other countries in South America – creating a cultural basis for future exchanges.

Other long-lasting ties began to be pursued in earnest when the Soviet government saw Latin America as a strategic area in which to invest after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. At this point, and as a way to put pressure on the US and to counterbalance the international order, Russia began military operations by sending advisors and arms to support various leftist guerrilla movements, as well as economically aid Cuba and Nicaragua. The "intellectual infrastructure" built up by the USSR during the Cold War still exists today as Dr. Ellis suggests in his article, *Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean: Return to the "Strategic Game,"* as exchange programs of students and Latin Americanists from the Soviet Union were sent to study in various countries across the region, while

Latin Americans studied in centers specifically built for them in Moscow and St. Petersburg for the extent of the Cold War from the 1950s to the 1980s.<sup>9</sup>

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia was forced to abandon nearly all investment in Latin America as an area of interest due to the shift of its economic system from a command economy to a *laissez faire* one. However, in 1997, former Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov visited several Latin American countries, “where he spoke of Latin America as a major Russia ally in the construction of a multipolar world.”<sup>10</sup> Even in the aftermath of the collapse, Russian leaders understood the potential economic and political opportunities that Latin America posed for Russia’s desired rise into a regional and then world power once more. Since the Cold War, Russia has seen Latin America as a way to pursue its national interests, and it uses the historical and cultural connection to the region to continue to enforce and expand its increasing influence there.

From Russia’s perspective, aligning itself with Latin American interests is beneficial because it symbolically and substantively detracts from US power in the region. In 2014, Sergei Lavrov made a trip across Latin America, with one of the purposes being, “to secure a deal with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (known by its Spanish acronym, CELAC) on visa-free travel.”<sup>11</sup> Symbolically the move comes after the EU’s refusal to accept a visa-free travel agreement with Latin American countries, as well as continued disagreements between several countries in the region and the US over excessively high barriers to entry into the US. Recently countries such as Argentina, Cuba, Venezuela, and Brazil have been added to the list of countries not required to have visas for their citizens to travel to Russia, which is a diplomatic indicator of close relations.

Russian overtures for mutual economic and political support to Latin American countries have been very apparent in the past several years alone. During the same trip by Minister Lavrov, “built on all the key points of previous Russian forays into Latin America: anti-Americanism, expanded trade and commercial ties (mainly, but certainly not exclusively, in energy), Russian interest in joining or obtaining observer status at any and all Latin American integration associations, as well as arms sales.”<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, Russia has been able to insert itself into many Latin American organizations to make progress on the “beachheads” established after years of historical and cultural ties. Deputy Minister Burlyai has suggested in his report that Russia seeks to further become involved in organizations such as: “the Andean Community (AC), the Central American Integration System, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).”<sup>13</sup> Alongside these, Russia already has observer status in the Organization of American States (OAS), MERCOSUR, ALBA, and others (BRICS and APEC). The level of interaction the Russian government maintains with at least one or more Latin American countries in various Intergovernmental

Organizations (IGOs) is quite extensive. Most of these organizations are economic in nature, and allow for continued and increased trade between Russia and the Latin American countries involved, which is the next level of relations between the two entities.

One of the most important trade-related ties between Russia and Latin America is the arms trade and military cooperation. As seen by the increasing number of arms sales every year, “several Latin American nations, namely Brazil, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela, prefer purchasing weapons from Russia as opposed to the United States because they have become habituated to this option, with Peru purchasing Soviet/Russian weaponry for 40 years.”<sup>14</sup> Generally speaking, Russian-made weapons are reliable, cheap, and easy to use, and thus developing countries like those of Latin America prefer buying Russian equipment. While there is still a large degree of variation depending on the country, Latin America is becoming more integrated with Russia militarily.

Additionally, the core allies of Russia (Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Ecuador) send officers to train in Russia, and have invited Russian naval forces and special forces to perform counternarcotic and naval drills, with Russian ships making port in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba within the past several years, with no intentions to end military exercises. Warplanes and naval vessels are not only sold to Latin American countries, however, but have also appeared in the region with increasing frequency. At the end of 2013, two Tu-160 strategic bombers flew, “From Venezuela...patrolled the Caribbean and also landed in Managua, the capital of Nicaragua.”<sup>15</sup> The fact that in the past two years bombers which can be equipped with nuclear weapons have successfully made flights across Latin America, as well as Russian vessels performing drills in the Caribbean so close to the US’ southern shores, is telling of how far Russia will go in the “Tit-for-tat syndrome,” where movements by NATO forces around Russia result in movements by Russian forces around the United States in response.<sup>16</sup> What may be even more serious of a concept is that Latin American countries now allow such maneuvers with disregard for US security. The rise of autonomy in Latin America demonstrates clearly how the region views itself with regard to Russia—as a growing regional bloc with potential allies not traditionally accepted by American hegemony. This view is indeed nearly the same as Russia’s perception of the potential of Latin America.

From the perspective of a number of Latin American countries, Russia has presented itself as a very viable and attractive alternative to a tumultuous age of American hegemony. The fascination and model of the United States for Latin American countries lasted for no more than 50 years after the independence of the US in 1776. Following this, a continuous flow of intervention and treatment as a lesser partner or worse, politically, economically, and militarily, left a great deal of resentment across Latin America toward the US. That resentment has

built up over time, and has manifested itself in populist leaders such as Hugo Chavez, Fidel Castro, and Daniel Ortega, who often trumpeted the abuses of the US in the region. By focusing resentment at internal and external issues facing the developing countries of Latin America, states within the region have found ways to instigate, at least symbolically, their policies of anti-Americanism and “third-way thinking,” by pursuing relations aggressively with traditional competitors of the US in the region—namely Russia and China. That is one reason why the core ideological allies of Russia began strengthening ties with Russia—as it was another form of protest with a rival of American hegemony that saw the US as an obstacle to future economic prosperity and growth, as well as a detrimental political influence in the world.

To an extent, Latin America has become much less dependent upon the US, especially in an economic sense. Countries like Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina are beginning to realize their potentials by exploring new economic routes in organizations like BRICS and MINT. To this effect, “It seems that it is not Russia that is soliciting Latin America and intruding in the United States’ historical sphere of influence, but rather Latin America and the Caribbean that are forging new opportunities for international cooperation with countries other than the U.S.”<sup>17</sup>

Latin America is as much of an actor as Russia or the US, and has recently found itself able to pursue broader national interests that coincide with those of Russia. Therefore, it is almost perfectly suited to continue pursuing and strengthening those relations as long as it too benefits from the political and economic agreements. Because the mutual goals are increased international influence and economic prosperity, there is no reason for Latin America and Russia to end their cooperation, particularly when it comes at the expense of the United States. Assuming events such as support for the annexation of Crimea and continued increased arms, food, and technology trade, there is little to no incentive to stop relations in favor of indifferent or hostile American foreign policy, particularly if that policy is unable or unwilling to effectively combat the Latin American-Russian nexus.

### **Recent Events in Latin America**

Within the past 15 years, the Russian government has made inroads to Latin America, highlighting the nature of the depth of the relationship between the two. Under the Putin and Medvedev Administrations, high-level visits by officials of the Russian government have emphasized the continued and growing interest of Russia to be active in the sphere of Latin America across a range of topics. Presidents Putin and Medvedev, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu have all made official trips to various Latin American countries from 2000 to 2015 to discuss political and historical ties between Russia and various countries in the region, joint defense and military operations in Latin

America, and the strengthening and expanding of trade and mutual economic development through investment projects.<sup>18</sup> Discussions over counter-narcotic naval exercises in the Caribbean, potential Russian naval bases, and increased arms deals to modernize Latin American militaries all highlight Russian activism by high-ranking officials and their desires.

Politically, Russia has developed ties with the previously mentioned core of Latin American allies: Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba; the group of leftist governments whose policies are founded on anti-Americanism, exacerbation with economic or social inequalities, and populist forms of socialism. Beyond this group, “In the Latin American countries with right-wing governments, new ties and mutual interest have been established.”<sup>19</sup> These right-wing governments include the countries of Mexico, Peru, and Colombia, which are traditionally strong allies of the United States politically and economically. Within the past five to ten years, however, such countries have also been developing economic ties with Russia to begin new infrastructural projects, energy exploration (for oil and natural gas), and increased arms and food deals. Economic deals highlight the realist approach of Russia and most Latin American countries, regardless of political orientation, since strong economic ties emphasize the commitment to prosperity and a multipolar world desired by both regions.

Before 2008, Russia’s activism in Latin America was not seen as particularly problematic, due to Russia’s relative passiveness in the international community. However, after the Georgian War in August of 2008, tensions arose between the US and Russia that have continued to build, descending to a new political low not seen since the Cold War, during the Ukraine Conflict beginning in 2014. The new geopolitical landscape in Latin America became clear, as seen by the number of countries that were not quick to condemn the Crimean referendum in 2014. The Bolivarian Alliance (ALBA), consisting of most of the aforementioned core ideological allies of Russia, supported the Russian position on Crimea. Members of MERCOSUR (the Southern Common Market) abstained in a UN vote regarding the fate of Crimea. This economic organization includes key states such as Brazil and Argentina, which Russia sees as key strategic allies in Latin America due to their relative wealth and political potential.

In other acts of autonomy from American hegemony, Nicaragua’s National Assembly “ratified the government’s decision allowing Russian military units, ships and aircraft to visit the republic in the first half of 2014.”<sup>20</sup> This came after Defense Minister Shoigu announced plans to potentially expand the number and scope of Russian military bases abroad, with countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Argentina on the list of countries willing to support such an endeavor.<sup>21</sup> Following the more assertive and militaristic approach, Russia has already conducted joint training exercises with Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba in the past five years regarding counternarcotic operations, and is preparing

to begin joint naval exercises in the Caribbean. Russia has recently supplied military equipment in the form of aircraft, guns, and naval vessels to countries like Peru, Brazil, and Russia's core allies. According to the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, trade turnover between Russia and Latin America grew to \$18.6 billion as of the end of 2013. This is a huge increase from \$5.8 billion in the early 2000s, which shows no signs of faltering due to Western-backed sanctions forcing Russia to find new economic markets to remain prosperous.<sup>22</sup>

### **Realism, Multipolarism, and Geopolitics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The concepts of realism, geopolitics, and multipolarism are the aspects that best explain the dynamics of the relationship between Latin America and Russia, since that relationship is increasingly demonstrating the unwillingness or inability of the United States to confront what may be an increasingly unfavorable world. Charles Glaser lays out the foundation of realism well by illustrating it more as a paradigm than one specific idea. Generally, realism contains a set of core elements: anarchy characterizing the international system (meaning a general lack of authority of any one international institution to control states); the idea that power is one of, if not the most important defining features of the international system (specifically states using hard power—military might and economic strength to achieve national interests); that states are unitary actors in the system, something debated due to the rise in IGOs and other elements in the decision-making process of states; and that states are rational actors (meaning that they make decisions best suited to the national interests they desire and pursue). Realists also tend to “black-box” other states, or assess relative positions of power through the strength and abilities of other states; see states as key actors in the international system (more important than non-state actors like NGOs and IGOs); and characterize the international system at any given point in time as being susceptible to war and competition between states. Glaser continues by further delineating forms of realism, but the basic fundamentals are the most important aspect of realism, as are the basic applications of those fundamentals.<sup>23</sup>

A significant addition to the idea of structural realism, a type of “neo-realism” was made by Kenneth Waltz, a policy theorist who contributed the idea of power balancing to the realist paradigm. To summarize, he wrote that the anarchy inherent within the international system was what forced states to compete with one another, since states with military prowess naturally feared one another's abilities, causing the continued buildup of power by different states. In practice, this created a “balance of power dynamic, whereby states either build-up their own power capabilities (internal balancing) or forge alliances with other states (external balancing) to balance the power of a rival state.”<sup>24</sup> This type of action by states arguably characterized both World Wars, for example, as well as the periods immediately before them, as powerful states pursued policies of aggressive

expansion and/or using hard power to maintain influence over weaker states and geographic territories as a symbol of power and capability.

While ideological affinity (found in socialist and communist circles) was also a factor in the natural development between Russia and certain Latin American countries, this general system is more or less the definition of geopolitics.<sup>25</sup> Political affinity was and is present between Russia and countries such as Cuba or Venezuela, but cannot be said to be the most impactful connection between said states, as constructivists in international theory might propose. The truth is that realism in the concept of geopolitics, which was adapted to the changing international system when the Cold War saw competition arise between two superpowers rather than several—the Soviet Union and the United States.

Currently, many members of Russia's policymaking leadership, including President Putin, apply the realism that governed Soviet policy during the Cold War today (as seen with the Crimea annexation, treatment of diplomacy with the US, counter-sanctioning, etc.), which contributes to understanding Russian policy in Latin America today. Therefore, one could assume that current Russian policymakers have taken lessons learned from the Soviet period of foreign policy, and have adapted it to fit the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where the sole superpower (the US) has existed and theoretically pursues recently developed and popular schools of thought such as liberalism and constructivism. In other words, since Russia is no longer a superpower able to compete with the US on the scale the USSR could, Russian leaders have had to make more influential policy with less resources and international standing in a more subtle and long-term approach to creating a favorable world for itself rather than supporting political revolutions in Latin American countries as it did during the Cold War, for example.

Russia has taken the globalized state of the world and pursued economic power as a means to strengthen financial, political, and cultural ties across Latin America to achieve its own national interests best (particularly prosperity and speeding multipolarity by reducing US influence in the region). This adapted structural realism is what drives Russian foreign policy today, as the Russian state continues to compete with the US, especially due to the feeling of encirclement by powerful Western elements (NATO, the EU, etc.) that threaten and create an obstacle to Russia's "Historical nationalism. The belief in Russia's greatness and its natural position as a global superpower."<sup>26</sup> The historical nationalism that pervades and justifies Russian foreign policy due to the nature of Russian society and "Russian psyche," makes the case that the ideas of John Mearsheimer, the scholar attributed with offensive realism—the idea that states exist to maximize their power. Such thought is prevalent in how Russia conducts itself on the world stage, as it attempts to gain power and influence relative to the US in areas like Latin America.

Another important concept to recognize is that of multipolarism, since it characterizes the world which may very well come to exist in the near future, depending on the ability of the US to maintain its grip on power. Many scholars believe that at this point, multipolarity in the world is a near certainty, given the slowing down of the relative influence of US hard and soft power across the world. Polarity is the idea in international theory that many, two, one, or even no countries possess the power to exert their will over the international system. The prefixes attached signify the number of powers in the system, so that three or more powers are a multipolar system (1930s-40s), two powers is a bipolar system (1945-1991), and one superpower is a unipolar system (1991-present). There is another concept in international theory called nonpolarity—or a world where no clear superpower or non-state agents exist as explained by foreign relations expert Richard Naas. Some believe the world is in the process of transitioning to such a world, but given that the idea is recent and unproven by time, it will not be considered as a viable alternative.

The key takeaway is that if strategies based on realism govern the international system, states will continue to strive to build their own power, theoretically to reach the position of superpower to most effectively achieve their national interests. If that is the case, then countries and regions well suited to create an alliance to achieve their interests will do so as rational state actors. It is reasonable at this point to assume that Russia and Latin America, now that it has begun its ascent onto the world stage after a period of development and lack of autonomy under colonialism and American hegemony, will act in their interests to create a favorable world order—a multipolar world order.

National security arises with reference to viewing various security threats and how they impact the Russia-Latin America dynamic and future. If the concept in offensive, structural realism that states have more or less the same interests (accumulation of power, prosperity, and security from external threats) is assumed to be true, then Russia and Latin America are pursuing the same self-serving goals, with the added notion that multipolarity (the end of US hegemony), would best suit Russia, as well as countries in Latin America in general. Logically, this hope is held by those powers that stand to gain the most in the region – Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico.<sup>27</sup> States are therefore the most important actors in the international system, that means that national security—viewing key threats to national security and interests as the most important— is also the most relevant in this context. Particularly in Russia's case (it is one country, more cohesive than an entire region of the world), the protection of interests and security of the state above all else, and particularly against other states (the West), national security is highlighted in its foreign policy decisions.

The greatest challenge that faces the United States at the moment is effectively coping with Russian intervention in Latin America, assuming diplomatic relations

remain as they are now or worsen within the next decade. The root of the problem extends back to the end of the Cold War in 1991 with the loss of Communism as the greatest national security threat to the US. The vacuum left by the absence of a clear-cut enemy to pursue left the US susceptible to the development of new ideas in international theory such as liberalism and constructivism, as the definition of security widened to include human and international security (rather than purely national security in a realist context).

Given the principles espoused by the US, it became convenient and simpler to pursue liberalism and its trappings (economic liberalism – the expansion of a free market system through globalization, creating economic interdependence), as well as the spread of democratic governments across the world.<sup>28</sup> The Clinton Administration for example pursued humanitarian liberalism by supporting NATO and UN operations in Rwanda, Somalia, and the Balkans, by increasing power to such international organizations over the actions of the global community (made easier by globalization and democratic governments). Constructivism also arose as a major theory of international thought, suggesting that states' interactions with one another are historically and socially constructed versus being based off of human nature or certain characteristics of the international system (role of states, goals of states, anarchy, etc.).<sup>29</sup> Scholars began to believe that, due to the lack of any particularly serious threats to American hegemony, and perceived victories of liberalist institutions and principles, that “the end of history” theorized by Francis Fukuyama was a legitimate claim (when large conflicts between states would end and an era of peace and prosperity begin). With that said, the assumption taken in this essay is that in fact realism (in particular structural, offensive realism) is the theory that best defines and governs the state of the world. Some argue that within realism are periods of peace that intersperse conflict and competition between states.

With the rise of Russia, China, Iran, and other antagonistic, revisionist powers, as well as threats of terrorism and cyberwarfare, conflict between how the world works (realism) and how the US wants the world to work (liberalism) has inevitably clashed. This clash is best illustrated by how ineffective US policy has been in successfully coping with, and achieving, security goals held by the US (destruction of terrorism, strong national defenses, determent of aggression by China or Russia, etc.). One region this clash occurs is in Latin America, where Russian structural, offensive realism competes with American liberalist and/or constructivist policies (that American hegemony is secure due to the strength of liberal free trade and democratic principles, or stronger social and historical ties with Latin America over Russian opportunism). But because the world is governed by realism at its core, and because Russian realism is a more active and aggressive form of foreign policy, the US has been unable to cope with Russian inroads into Latin America. To effectively roll back or combat Russian assertions

in the region, the US must use “fire to fight fire” (a more realist-inspired policy with Latin America).

At this point, the long-term national interests of Russia and Latin America remain united in a desire for economic prosperity, and the faster arrival of a multipolar world where both have relative influence over regions of the world. To achieve this, Latin American nations and Russia seek to balance out power with the US in Latin America for this purpose (as Latin America is not and will not likely be able to successfully enact policy in a united manner in any other area of the world).

### **Conclusions**

In an interview in 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that, “We are interested in strong, economically stable and politically independent, united Latin America that is becoming an important part of the emerging polycentric world order.”<sup>30</sup> Given the past 15 years of Latin American movement toward a Russian-led sphere, it would seem as though the region wants to pursue the same policy goals. The historical ties between the two regions create a basis from which current cooperation is not only easily facilitated but also almost natural. If the realist school of thought is assumed to be true, then it would make sense that naturally, Latin America and Russia, both of which have potential to exude more influence in their respective regions, would wish to see that expand onto the international stage, to a more favorable context—a multipolar world.

As Russia has begun a more aggressive foreign policy to display its reinvigorated military and economy, it is in the position to pursue such goals further abroad, in Latin America, which is yet unable to coherently influence the world outside its own region. Therefore, Russian leaders, with experiences from the Cold War, will use realist, geopolitical strategy to confront perceived challenges to the nationalism that pervades its policies – specifically the US. One of the best ways it has found, is to engage a region nearly devoid of US attention given current events, and that has enough history with the US to have built up a resentment and desire for autonomy that would make an aligning of interests mutually beneficial.

For the US, the past historical grievances perceived by Latin America, combined with a lack of interest today, as well as a liberalist foreign policy to date has not allowed it to sufficiently maintain its grip to the south of its borders. That said, the inevitability of a Russia-Latin America sphere, or the faster transition into multipolarism is not necessarily evident either.

However, there are measures the United States can take that would allow for a refocus on Latin America to counter Russian intervention there. Those policies, which should theoretically take place within the next decade, would be best to mimic Russian activity today. By pursuing economic and political dialogue with

the region with the mutually beneficial policies between equal partners, the US government can show Latin American leaders that the era of the Monroe Doctrine has truly ended, as Secretary of State John Kerry announced at the end of 2013.<sup>31</sup> This action alone is a significant step in the direction of mutual respect and moderation that could benefit the US. Fortunately, it also shares a positive history with Latin America, and can use this to justify further involvement in supporting organizations like MERCOSUR, the OAS, or others. Opening up political relations with Cuba by beginning dialogue between both governments has also been a step noticed across Latin America as one in a positive direction.

Unless the US is able to pursue a moderated approach to governments (particularly contrarian, anti-American governments) in the region, Latin America will continue to drift toward Russia, creating an unfavorable world order in the future. In this case, moderation includes countering Russian involvement in Latin American trade and political organizations, normalizing relations with “security threats” such as Venezuela or Cuba that begins a more active and apologetic role in developing Latin America to their mutual benefit. The projection for National Intelligence Council (NIC) 2030 in the Stalled Engines World, where the US draws inward and allows competitors to fill vacuums to pursue their interests is not inevitable.<sup>32</sup> At the moment, Russia has illustrated the trend by successfully making inroads into Latin America in an effort to create a balance against US hegemony as a unipolar state in the international system today.

Without action within the near future, this cooperation between Latin America and Russia could create an unfavorable world order for the US as multipolarism comes to the fore of the international system, but will certainly benefit Russia and Latin America to the extent of the investment in their reinvigorated relationship.

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