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Accountability and Security in a Multipolar World: Notes on the Effects of Multipolarity in Multilateral Mechanisms

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One of the essential features of the Westphalian international system is that states are primarily responsible for their own security, beginning with the preservation of territorial integrity. Accordingly, in thinking about international relations, one of the central problems is the study of how to ensure security conditions for each sovereign state. To simplify a lengthy debate, one can envisage two basic solutions: security relying on internal means, objective, such as the armed forces, and subjective, such as national cohesion; the second solution would be pursued within the interplay of relations between states and its most common manifestation would be in the alliances formed. Evidently, the internal and external guarantees are complementary and combine in a balanced and sufficient way, dependant on various factors, such as the degree of threat that a state suffers from and the distribution of power in the international system. It is evident that a small state, with a modest military and a hostile environment to endure, has requirements that differ to those of a superpower isolated by oceans. Another factor to consider when forming alliances in order to strengthen security is the system's distribution of poles of power. Recall two typical situations: in bipolar systems, such as in the Cold War, the superpowers offer security in exchange for ideological alignment to the block; in the multipolar systems, such as Europe in the nineteenth century, the situation is necessarily more complex and flexibility exists in the composition of alliances. Today, the international system has components of multipolarity, but with distinctive differences from traditional forms. One of the "new" features is precisely the fact that, since the Treaty of Versailles, traditional security mechanisms, supported by the use of power, coexist with multilateral institutions.

In fact, there exists with the United Nations, as having existed to a lesser degree with the League of Nations, an institutional alternative that provides security solutions to the state based on widely accepted legal provisions. Collective security models, neither in the case of the League, nor in the case of the UN, have intended to replace or eliminate the primary mechanisms of security, but rather increase the offer of security to individual states, indicating that in some cases, in the face of a threat to a state's territorial integrity, the international community is willing to act collectively to counter such threat. Another "advantage" of multilateral solutions is that, in theory, its legitimacy is assured beforehand, provided the procedure is followed that has been established by the institutions in order to mobilize in case of defence of one of its members. That is, in the case of the UN Charter, universally accepted standards for limiting the exercise of force constitute an additional factor in ensuring the sovereignty of states.

The collective security mechanisms, however, do not exist in a political vacuum. Multilateral norms are beacons for the behaviour of states, not impositions. The success or failure of the supply and provision of collective security is, in part, outside the logic of multilateral institutions. One of the factors that determine the success of the provision of multilateral security is precisely the distribution of power in the international system, which as prescribed by the realist school, is the base from which to explain the dynamics of the international system. Today, the international order is more complex, and other actors such as NGOs influence the international agenda and consequently, the behaviour of states. Yet, for the sake of argument, let's limit the analysis to the interaction between powers and thus, to the multipolar-multilateral relationship and its consequences for security. A natural question would be: Given the assumption that the contemporary international system consolidates the tendency towards multipolarity, what is the outlook for the multilateral provision for security? Would it be strengthened or weakened?

What does the theory state? The classical analysis of the multipolar dynamic takes as a reference the balance of power in international relations in Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. For simplicity, there would be as a general rule, four or five countries, with equivalent capabilities for power, and the balance between them preventing hegemonic tendencies to crystallize. Aimed to preserve the territorial integrity, the movement triggers defensive alliances when it identifies hegemonic will in one of the actors, articulating mechanisms to block its advances. Like this, it has happened with Louis XIV, Napoleon, and Hitler, etc. There are two features worth highlighting: disputes typically involved gains in territories, and warfare was an alternative (either to assert or block hegemony). The classical formalization of the process is outlined by Morton Kaplan, who outlines, by using a few simple rules, the central theme of the classical balance of power. In his realist model multilateral institutions have no explicit place, since, in theory, the process of adjusting the balance occurs through the shifting of power.¹

In the interwar period between 1918-1939, the international order has clearly been multipolar, with an important qualification: unlike the classical system, and to use the

¹ Morton Kaplan, "Variants on Six Models of the International System", in James Rosenau's *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, The Free Press, Nova York, 1969, pag 291.

language of Kaplan, a “universal actor “ is introduced with the League of Nations, whose precise objective is to ensure the resolution of disputes through formal rules.² With the formulas of the League for the peaceful settlement of disputes it is intended that the states resolve disputes by respecting the rules, which the political way of proceeding in the early years of the twentieth century would have been unable to achieve. However, this is not what has happened. The League of Nations becomes, over time, a waning component in international proceedings. Various elements undermine it, starting with the fragility of institutions, the absence of the United States, the inability to accommodate losers’ demands in a balanced manner, etc. The functionality of the League is subject to a particular political framework that assumes convergence between the European powers to contain Germany, and, simultaneously, maintains the territorial status quo on the continent and in the colonies. The framework falls apart, and as a consequence, the League becomes a super-structure of rules and resolutions without practical value, without influence over events that are going in the opposite direction to the ideals the League has set out. The failure of the security model leads to Germany’s hegemonic ambitions, thwarted by military means with the defeat of Nazi fascism. Between the wars, the collective responsibility for security is discarded, becoming an alusion on paper, without constraining or limiting the behaviour of states.

Looking back on what happened between World Wars; one possible conclusion is that the multipolar system can lead to opposing solutions: in the post-World War I period, it lead to the creation of the League; in the 1930s, it determined its collapse. What has been functional in 1920 ceased to be so a few years later. I.e. the fact that there is a multitude of poles as such does not pre-define the nature of the dynamics between them; whether it will be cooperation, competition or aggression. Multipolarity, reduced to its essence, opens up the possibility of international conduct that favours the containment of hegemonic vocations. But it does not say how or when this will happen, or if the multilateral apparatus will have a role in the process or not.

In the aftermath of World War II, multipolarity dissolves, and the United States and the Soviet Union, with their advantages of power and their capacity for ideological leadership, they begin to command the two blocks that are at the core of the international dynamics between 1945 and 1989. During the period, although the UN seeks to correct the institutional weaknesses of the League with the mandatory provisions of Chapter VII, the political support that should have ensured the functionality of the Organization empties itself with ideological confrontation and the Security Council’s consequent paralysis. The paralysis has however been interrupted from time to time by episodes of convergence when the blocks have been interested to work together, such as during operations in Cyprus, in the Congo and during the Korean War. One striking example was the adoption of Resolution 242 by the Council in 1967, which stipulated the basis for peace in the Middle East; even though it has never fully achieved its objectives. With the end of the Cold War, having overcome the conflict between the blocks, the optimistic hypothesis was that the spirit of San Francisco would prevail, with a return to understanding amongst the powers, and consequently that the UN would fully carry out its functions.

² Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics*, Nova York, John Wiley&Sons, 1957, p. 121.

This was not exactly what happened. From the early '90s until today, the trajectory of the United Nations has been, to say the least, uneven. There have been successes, such as the pacification of South Africa and national reconstruction in East Timor, yet on the other hand, there have been obvious failures, such as the genocide in Rwanda, the Srebrenica massacre, and more recently, the United States' disrespect for Security Council's decisions as illustrated by the invasion of Iraq. Today, with the crisis aggravating in Syria, and problems with North Korea and with Iran's nuclear program, the opinion prevails that the collective security mechanism has become fragile, incapable of dealing with the more evident and dramatic challenges - which may have far reaching global consequences. We are far from the scenario of the League's collapse; after all, the UN today has about a hundred thousand soldiers and police in approximately fifteen peacekeeping operations. Still, the diagnosis is that the UN has impaired its ability to justly act in tragic conflicts, especially when the interests of the permanent members in the Security Council clash.

One aspect of the political context where impediments to a substantial and prominent role of the Council persist is precisely the dispersion of power. Today, more than in the immediate post-Cold War period, poles of power have multiplied. Is it possible that there is a link between the collective security mechanism's paralysis and the nature of multipolarity itself?

As we have seen, multipolarity does not necessarily engender the reinforcement of multilateral institutions. Thus, in order to examine what is happening today, one of the preliminary steps is to understand what multipolarity is and to examine its consequences for the international order. To do this, it would not be inappropriate to compare today's multipolarity with "classic" multipolarity. There are some notable differences which may help to explain the recurrent deadlock to solutions proposed by the "multilateral option". First, unlike the multipolarity of the classical period in Europe, today, there are not five equal powers. The United States holds a special status, as it holds instruments of power, especially military ones, which differentiate it from the other poles. The identities of the other poles are known, albeit the number of countries that have weight in shaping the international agenda continues to grow. Alongside those which form the traditional and obvious poles, such as China, Russia, France, and Great Britain, striking by virtue of the universal scope of their international actions and their institutional advantages (such as a veto power in the Security Council), others "emerge", such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, Turkey, South Africa, Mexico, South Korea, etc., which certainly have an influence on regional issues and some weight in certain global issues (it is hard to think of solutions to issues as environment or trade without taking into account the disposition of Brazil and India). Their capacity to participate significantly on the international stage is however more vague.³

In classic multipolarity, hegemonic vocation focussed on territorial control; therefore, it was essentially characterized by spatial movements. Today, territorial disputes have

³ In the post-Cold War era, the issue of defining the poles and how they were related became the object, and still was in 1994, in the article I co-authored with Celso Lafer, "Questions for Diplomacy in the Context of Undefined Polarities", Gelson Fonseca and Sergio Castro Nabucco (organizers), *Foreign Policy Issues II*, São Paulo, Paz e Terra, 1994. I took up the subject again in an article, "Notes on the Question of Polarities and the Future of Multilateralism", in the book *New Ways of Law in the XXI Century: a tribute to Celso Lafer, Luis O. Baptista and Tertius S. Ferraz* (coordinators), Curitiba, Juruá Editores, 2012.

not disappeared, some are explicit (Malvinas/Falkland, Bolivia's aspirations to the sea, the Diaoyu or Senkaku Shoto islands between China and Japan, maritime borders in Southeast Asia, the conflict between North and South Korea, India and Pakistan, etc.), others are implicit (the invasion of Afghanistan to eliminate the Taliban, or the hegemonic objectives of Iraq in the Middle East.). Despite the imminent likelihood of escalation of territorial disputes in Asia, the fact remains that there are tendencies heading for the opposite direction, especially economical tendencies, due to the high degree of integration of production and trade in a globalized world. The conflicts in the Middle East are another area that poses a risk to global security and where predominantly political factors of contention prevail.⁴ Moreover, we can see that today, territorial gains do not necessarily bring strategic advantages (they may even bring the contrary; territorial control imposes enormous difficulties and rarely "resolves" problems, as illustrated by the case of Afghanistan or Iraq) and that disputes over hegemony are scattered in an international agenda that is extremely diverse. The crux of the dispute is no longer one of space, but rather one that centres on regulatory processes.

In fact, the contemporary international system, since the League, and more clearly since the United Nations, has a feature that differentiates itself from the classical system, as for example the European system between the treaties of Westphalia (1648) and Versailles (1919): the high level of regulation, which essentially refers to the creation of standards of legitimacy for almost all issues on the international agenda, in addition to the establishment of mechanisms to prevent and clear conflicts. The success in complying with the rules varies according to the issue. And we know that the lack of predictability, when it comes to compliance with the rules, is one of the key factors that render the multilateral system fragile, especially on the subject of security. Given the ubiquity of normative spaces, disputes (and agreements) between poles almost always occur in the context of regulatory processes; sometimes to control them, sometimes to extend benefits, and sometimes to block opponents' claims. Indeed, questions of security, trade, environment, values, combating organized crime and terrorism, and so forth, are directly or indirectly part of the agenda of multilateral forums. Today, more power and more hegemony often mean multilateral gains as well as the possibility to control the agenda of institutions and by doing so, to extract advantages in multilateral negotiations.

As the agenda that refers to issues that matter to the powers is very broad one of the consequences is that the objectives – and consequently the adversaries – do not remain the same over the course of time (as in seventeenth-century Europe when France wanted the territories of what is now Germany to remain divided, or when Great Britain wanted to prevent a country from becoming hegemonic in Europe, etc.). Nowadays, international processes are necessarily more variable, in part because of the remote possibility that a country, even the most powerful, makes an attempt for a transverse and global hegemony; provided that the classic rules of the balance of powers would apply and as such other

⁴ In contrast to the Cold War period, the conflicts are not ostensibly manipulated and stimulated by super powers. Today, the powers differ with regard to the ways of how to deal with them, as it is especially the case with Russia and the United States in the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, until now, there is greater caution and as such, a tendency to "contain" the forms of intervention and consequently, to avoid the expansion of the conflict, which would have unforeseeable consequences.

powers would ally together against such an ambition.⁵ What we have, in reality, are alliances that vary according to the issue at hand, following the formula of what is called “variable geometry”. The U.S. and EU agree on many security issues (not all), but can diverge on matters of trade and environment. The U.S. has several areas of disagreement with China and Russia, now dramatically more so in view of the conflict in Syria. But on other issues, China may be closer to the U.S. (where it invests a good part of its reserves), and does not want to see terrorism spread, since it could potentially become stage for extremists’ activities. Another is that, with globalization, the poles are constantly interacting in various ways. The tendency is that there are preferential alliances (USA, Great Britain), ongoing rivalries around specific issues (the U.S. and China on issues of the limits of multilateral intervention in internal conflicts), incidental confrontations (Russia and USA in the Snowden case) but there are no radical movements of confrontation between the poles; even in times of conflict, diplomatic relations and dialogue continue.⁶ As a rule, the discourse between the poles is rarely one of confrontation.

Complexity in the forms of interaction does not eliminate aspirations. Thus, in more general terms, the issue is to discuss what the overall dynamics of multipolarity are. If the agenda is diverse, the overall aim of the poles would be to amass specific gains in order to ensure increasingly strong positioning and hegemony. But precisely because the agenda is diverse, the accumulation of monopolistic gains is a difficult task, almost impossible. For each item on the agenda there is a different rationale and different ways to play the game. As background and before examining the specific security issues, two words about the dispute for hegemony in economic matters and values, which may serve for a point of comparison to be debated on security issues.

Economic hegemony would be built around three pillars: weight of the country’s share of world GDP and its effects on the dynamics of the international system; control of the rules governing commercial and financial flows; and finally, projection of organizational production models. Historically, the example of Great Britain in the 19th century demonstrates how these three dimensions came together, which combined global importance of its economic presence, cutting edge production methods with the industrial revolution, and dissemination of the ideology of free trade and of the gold standard. In the post World War II period, between 1945 and 1970, the United States repeated the pattern of British hegemony. Having come to represent 50% of world GDP, the U.S. spread a capitalist model with low regulation and, in the sphere of regulation, the dollar prevailed as

⁵ The defense of the advantages of multipolarity was made in the well-known article by Deutsch and Singer, “Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability,” *World Politics* XVI in April 1964. The argumentation by Rosecrance is simple: “multipolarity affords a greater number of interaction opportunities ... The number of possible dyadic relationships in a multipolar system is very great, and it rises in increasing proportion to the number of poles. This plenitude of interacting partners means that there is a greatly reduced danger of mutually reinforcing antagonism between two states. Individual states will have associations with a great variety of others; their cross cutting loyalties will tend to reduce hostility expressed toward one particular state or one particular cause”. V. Richard Rosecrance, “Bipolarity, Multipolarity and the Future”, James Rosenau, op. cit., page 328.

⁶ Regarding relations between Japan and China, see Richard Katz, “Mutual Assured Destruction: why trade will limit conflict between China and Japan”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 2013, pages 18-24. On the same issue, it is worth reading the interview with the Chinese Ambassador to the U.S., “Beijing’s New Brand Ambassador: a conversation with Cui Tiankai” in which the list on the agenda of relations between China and the U.S. is dissected, but with the concern that discrepancies - and there are many - are invariably balanced with the discourse on the possibility of reconciliation and accommodation.

a reserve currency, and in the GATT, the most-favoured-nation clause (the Soviet model, the hegemonic socialist bloc, evidently obeyed other standards). It seems to be clear that today, no country would be able to combine all three dimensions that make up economic hegemony. Even though the U.S. position is privileged (still the highest GDP, around 20% of the world and largest importer of goods in world trade), the prospect seems evident that other countries, such as China, or groups such as the Union European, gain increasing weight in propelling the world economy. On the other hand, even though the market economy is the dominant model, there is not one hegemonic model of capitalism. Certainly the U.S. is not; the social democratic Europe is in crisis; and China has its own peculiarities, and relies on a combination historically difficult to replicate (a socialist bent with traits of market economy). The preference for market solutions is predominant, but open questions remain such as what market arrangements should prevail, what role should the state play, what is the optimal degree of openness. Another aspect is the influence that other countries, such as the emerging ones, begin to exert on the economic level.

In this context, in terms of regulation, one of the consequences is negotiation deadlock when specific interests clash because hegemony is not exercised, for example such a practice that could lead to a certain vision of trade prevailing in the Doha Round. That is, given the differences in economic interests, in the short or medium term, given the lack of a hegemon, the establishment of global rules is difficult, since the dispersion of power consequently diffuses the capacity to influence the negotiation processes. Multipolarity makes room for competition, which translates into varied institutional models, but in today's conditions, makes it difficult to articulate solutions to global order without crossing that difficult process of accommodation. In contrast, intense relations between the poles (expressed in the high value of total global trade), the proliferation of partial arrangements (integration agreements that could serve allocated partners), and the current rules for trade (albeit unsatisfactory) make more regulation dispensable for the system to function satisfactorily, especially for those countries less affected by the distortions that currently exist, such as in the agricultural market. The idea that more rules are a good thing for trade is universally accepted, but there are shifts from global to local. The most recent example is a proposed free trade agreement between the U.S. and the European Union.⁷

It is symptomatic that the greatest gain in regulation has been the dispute settlement system, which has a high degree of success to the extent that virtually all of its decisions are respected. It is clear that dispute settlements serve the settlement of individual cases and, in itself, would not be an expression of gains of hegemony.

In short, in the economic sphere, the poles are easy to identify (GDP, participation in trade, weight in trade and financial negotiations etc., G 20 descriptors), and the degree of regulation is high, even though today the obstacles to progress are evident. Finally, it must be considered that the biggest deficiency of regulation is precisely the tapering off of discussions on how to mitigate income inequalities between nations.

⁷ Não tratei do tema financeiro que ampliaria muito a exposição. De qualquer modo, a evolução recente do G20 mostra as dificuldades de estabelecer "regras" que estabilizem processos de cooperação e criem mecanismos consistentes de solução dos problemas comuns.

A second area of hegemonic dispute would be of a symbolic nature and it concerns the definition of values that would constitute the fundamentals of the international legitimacy of states. In this case, the first observation is that there are no “strong” ideological articulations, as there have been during the Cold War, driven by the blocks’ leadership, and proposing models for social or political organization. They have been replaced by values that should be accepted as universal. In fact, today, the ideals of democracy and human rights would be central to the dominant values of international legitimacy, but not in a distinctly hegemonic way. One reason for this lies in the fact that no power identifies entirely with these values. Or more precisely, the power can use the language of human rights in an attempt to justify its international actions. However, violations for political interests seem to be the rule and not the exception. Furthermore, interpretations on how to put those human rights into practice vary with geography: the Asian interpretation of the human rights doctrine is not congruent with the Western interpretation.

The balance of the multilateral framework that deals with values, however, differs from what is presented above in the economic dimension. At a symbolic level, there exists a global consensus, expressed primarily in human rights conventions and in the WTO rules, being the equivalent with regard to the economy. Yet, advances in the promotion of human rights are not continuous and the Doha Round is stalled because of a lack of solutions in crucial issues such as agriculture. On the other hand, in the area of human rights, binding instruments, such as the WTO dispute settlement system, have not been implemented. Another difference is that, in terms of values, the poles are not necessarily global leaders. This is partly because hegemonic values, such as human rights, no longer are «owned» by the states that have the political power. One reason is that the poles are vulnerable and soft power depends on constant renovation (the example of the U.S. in Guantanamo demonstrates how it can be weakened when a country violates its international legitimacy). Another difference is the fact that the agenda of values is driven by NGOs, social movements, etc. The dispute for hegemony is confined to the political use of the human rights platform and the issue of democracy ends up to be linked to a strategic regime change. In the Cold War years, especially in the Carter administration, the human rights platform could still identify with the American leadership and thus, was used politically. Likewise, the Soviets gained symbolical value with social transformation causes. That is, the ideology has been associated with an increase in soft power. Today, this identification does not exist and to use soft power has become an exercise in another complexity.

A brief reference to the symbolic and economic dimensions of the international process attempts to show that multipolarity has specific effects that vary depending on the agenda: economic power does not guarantee soft power or soft power does not stimulate economic growth. In this context, how does the logic of security operate in comparison with the preceding ones? As we have seen, the primary responsibility for security is national and is based on national instruments of power or on alliances. Nevertheless, for some countries and for the international system as a whole, the security guaranteed by multilateralism increases in relevance, starting with the fact that it relies on legal standards and its criteria would be valid universally to all states. Secondly, the purpose of the rule of law in the UN Charter is that an international order is created in which the rules of non-intervention, respect for sovereignty, peaceful settlement of disputes etc.,

guide the behavior of states. Ideally, those rules would have a systemic effect, i.e. a better order for all. Yet realistically, those who need a legal system the most are precisely the ones with less power. In what way does multipolarity shape the scope of this ideal?

We know that multipolarity and the subsequent dispersion of its agenda leads to a redefinition of the multilateral response to security issues. For the purpose of its characterization, we can start with a few remarks on the dimension of security and the dimensions that have been discussed before, namely the economic and symbolic dimensions. Essentially, the key players are the same. Yet, there are substantial differences. While the dispute settlement system of the WTO is more predictable, and deals with predefined interests, the mandatory decisions of the Security Council are not always respected, subject to strategic interests and political settings. Furthermore, in the Council, there is the instrument of the veto, which indeed, as its name indicates, gives the five members the right to block any proposal they oppose. In other words, the field of security is unique in the way that there exist institutional privileges.⁸ On the other hand, at the symbolic level, the standards of legitimacy, despite being subject to variations in interpretation, have a solid legal expression in the various human rights treaties; in terms of security the factor that triggers the process of collective security, the threat to peace, is not fixed. Or rather, additional to its interpretation being subject to strategic interests, the expansion of scope, by means of actions in failed states that are affected by internal conflict, renders concerted action by states in the Security Council even more difficult. The response of the Council, given a common understanding of what constitutes a “threat to peace”, is always easier in cases of territorial invasion, for which the concept of collective security has been conceived originally.⁹

The characterization of the multilateral responsibility for security, however, requires other elements. The first thing to note is that in the specific area of security, threats between the poles are not direct, as they have been in the inter-war or Cold War periods. Despite disputes, as previously noted, the territorial integrity of the poles is not directly threatened and the chances of war between them are remote. On the other hand, under certain circumstances, territorial control might be part of a strategic move, as in the case of the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan by the U.S., and in a different scenario, as a reaffirmation of historical influence and with a different degree of legitimacy, it is worth remembering France’s military presence in Côte d’Ivoire (2002) and Mali (2012). The absence of territorial disputes between the powers does not mean that a lasting kind of stability has been reached which permanently (or in the near future) discards the possibility of violence between them, or that disputes over influence have been overcome. In the Middle East and on the Korean peninsula, although contained in the short term, chances of conflict are closer and it is difficult to predict the global implications they would have. That is, we are far from a global zero sum game, since the quest for strategic advantage or for imposition of world views continues to be a fundamental part of the international process.

⁸ In theory, in the determination of voting power in the IMF and World Bank, there are privileges that are defined, in theory, by objective factors linked to participation in the global economy. This would therefore be changeable over time, although we know the difficulties to alter the distribution of voting power in these institutions.

⁹ For the drafters of the Charter, the objective was to avoid a repeat of the invasions that were carried out by Nazi Germany. Containing and repelling territorial invasions was at the core of the concept of collective security.

In this sense, one of the features of the contemporary international system is the special status of the U.S., which has unique advantages of power, both militarily and economically, in comparison with other poles. The unique global presence of the U.S. means that, first, they have “ideas and intentions” for the entire universal agenda. Even though few ideas are accepted and many remarks are challenged, the United States have a universal strategy which can be confused with a movement of hegemonic assertion. It would appear that the movement is inherent in the position of power of the U.S.. It can carry out military operations unilaterally, as it did in Afghanistan and Iraq, unlike any other country. But military success (even if, in both cases, limited and controversial) does not necessarily mean strategic gain (the initial victory over the Taliban did not put an end to the Taliban and it is difficult to assess if its intervention has played a successful role in containing terrorism; there is an evident gap between what they intended with the invasion of Iraq and the moment when the troops have been withdrawn). Nevertheless, there are two universal attitudes of the U.S. foreign policy that stand out. The first is strategic in nature and involves preventive measures which are adopted when faced with the prospect of the rise of other powers, especially China. Recently, the pivotal shift in focus towards Asia would be typical. The second is to participate in all regional conflicts, be it spontaneous participation, or participation in response to a plea from a party involved in a conflict. There are, in this case, several scenarios: (i) - those in which the American interpretation is one of a direct and immediate threat, leading, ultimately, to unilateral interventions, some with legitimacy (the case of the expulsion of Saddam Hussein’s army from Kuwait in 1991 and the invasion of Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks of 2001) and others without legitimacy (such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which the Security Council had objected) (ii) - those in which there is a threat but not of a direct or imminent nature, and whose overcoming is highly complex from a strategic perspective, as in the case of North Korea’s acquisition of nuclear weapons, or Iran’s acquisition of nuclear capacities; (iii) - those in which, unlike the previously mentioned, do not have, even on the strategic level, clear solutions, usually because they involve internal conflicts, in which conditions to participate are contentious and outcomes are far from foreseeable (such as the situation in Syria or, more recently, the internal conflicts in Egypt, due to the fall of Morsi). For partners of U.S. actions of universal scope, the compensation can be support or alignment; although more commonly it is wariness and mistrust (even, in some cases, for the allies, as in the case of electronic spying conducted by the NSA). In any arena, the gains of the U.S. would be “different” since they would confirm and expand the unique position it enjoys. You do not get a picture of steady and systematic confrontation with a hegemonic will, because this is not manifested as such, but resistance is not uncommon.

The most conspicuous manifestation of this trend reveals itself in the difficulty the U.S. faces in taking action.¹⁰ Examples are many: difficulties in deciding how and when to withdraw troops from Iraq and Afghanistan; hesitations due to problems related to human rights and the dismantling of the Guantanamo prison; the inability of a clear stance on the episodes of the Arab Spring; dubiousness in the handling of the coup

¹⁰ On the difficulty of taking action in Egypt, it is worth reading the article by Steve Simon, whose title is symptomatically: “The U.S. Have no Leverage in Egypt”, *International Herald Tribune*, August 21, 2013.

against Morsi in Egypt, and so on. Let's say the problems are inherently complex, which involves strategic and symbolic dilemmas. It is worth an example: from the point of view of values, defending democracy and reconciliation is natural, however, how should such values be applied in situations such as the coup in Egypt? Defending the fall is to go against democracy, criticizing it seems to go against democracy of the streets (which had been defended as a positive movement until very recently). This leads one analyst to conclude "The result of this vacillation? All sides in Egypt now hate the United States, which are convinced backs their enemies".¹¹

Thus, the core of the contemporary multipolar process is marked by unilateral distortions as compared to the classical model. The privileged pole, although fulfilling the conditions for universal presence, lacks the capacity to be prevalent. It is not hegemonic in the Gramscian sense and the military capacity serves little to address issues of the international agenda. This is one of the factors that would explain the paralysis of the international agenda and the difficulty of advancing on security matters both on conceptual issues, as in the case of responsibility for protection, and in specific conflicts. In itself, the relative decline of the U.S. would not be negative and could even create conditions for a more balanced order. However, "advancement" on security issues demands various conditions to be met, starting with legitimacy provided by the Security Council (and therefore, uniformity of vision of the five permanent members of the Security Council), and also the provision of regional actors to act (it is impossible to imagine a solution to Middle East problems without the cooperation of regional actors, or North Korea without China and Russia, etc).

For strategic reasons or other interests, an agreement between the super power, members of the Security Council and other actors, who necessarily participate in the "problem solving", does not happen frequently. It therefore creates a new and curious situation: the actions of the most powerful can be blocked while at the same time, the other poles, given the range of positions on the agenda items, do not possess adequate capacity to create an alternative reality for the international order. For this reason, there is a void in legitimacy - or weakness in the arguments that would lead to strong legitimacy and thus concerted action from the international community - with obviously paralyzing effects. Multipolarity is often more competitive than cooperative, and consequently, effectively can block multilateral solutions. On the other hand, as it is not engineered for complex scenarios of multiple interactions between the poles, competition gets diluted in a fragmented agenda, and direct conflicts between the powers are contained by the dynamics of globalization, which revalidates the idea of Montesquieu, that "l'effet est naturel du commerce porter à la paix" (Peace is the natural effect of trade).

With the blockade of the Security Council to act in some dramatic conflicts and the inertia in the movement to reform it, the impression is that for the permanent members,

¹¹ Jonathan Tepperman, "Waffle, Vacillate, Fail", International Herald Tribune, 10-11/08/2013. The author, who examines the symbolic value of the operation and U.S., concludes: "What this suggests is that even more than having the right policy is having a policy, and sticking to it. By trying to play both sides, the Obama administration is winning over neither. It's left with the worst of all words, and both Americans and the people of Egypt, Turkey, Cambodia, Zimbabwe (you can go down the list) are paying the price".

it is more convenient to accept that the future shall be a repeat of the present, in which the powers are accommodated and unthreatened in the short term, rather than to imagine other possible future scenarios of increased cooperation. Security responsibilities become diluted, suggesting that the problems were greater than the willingness to solve them. The bleak picture does not change, but the assumption that there exist factors that could induce the transformation of multipolarity into a cooperative, and at the same time its non-occurrence, is a crucial issue in understanding the political dynamics of our times. One hypothesis is that there is still ongoing cohesion between the emerging powers (or cohesion is episodic, as in BRICS). As such, conditions for joint exercises for global projection have not yet been defined. We return to an earlier topic.

The dynamics of the poles are a necessary reference in order to understand the international process, but as they tend to block rather than create solutions, there are characterizations of the international system that tend to dismiss them as builders of order. While they serve to begin to explain how the system works, they do not complete the explanation. An exemplary article in this line, not only by its title, is that of Lllana Perez, “Depolarization”, which presents the viewpoint that with the decline of the U.S. and the rise of the emerging countries, a new international structure would be defined. However, he says that “there is a complex network of interests where power is dematerialized in each subsystem that hierarchy is not defined [...] Therefore, it is more appropriate to refer to a depolarized world “. ¹² Josef Joffe makes a similar reflection in analyzing the relationship between the U.S. and Germany, the two most powerful Western countries, concluding that, for various reasons (such as “self-containment” of the U.S.), “[i]n the West, the U.S. and Germany are the last two men standing, yet they would rather sit down in their respective corners. The price is high: the ‘nonpolar’ or an ‘a-polar’ world where nobody is in charge”. ¹³ Disregarding any eventual excess rhetoric from analysts, the fact remains that what is missing are clear parameters to determine order, and more than that, predict in which way it will evolve to address security issues.

There is a deficit of order, but with results that are not uniform. It would seem that disorder is localized. It is evident that the minimum grounds for an “international society”, as defined by Hedley Bull, are met. Planes arrive and leave international airports, letters reach their addressees, multilateral meetings occur frequently, norms that protect sovereignty from territorial invasions are respected (digital ones less so), treaties are fulfilled, trade and financial flows are not interrupted. Nevertheless, there are grave outbreaks of disorder that trigger humanitarian tragedies, and often multilateral institutions are incapable of concerted action in order to overcome them. As of today, multipolarity is competitive and the first victims are exactly the societies that most need the functioning of provisional multilateral security. Today, the most deplorable statistics are those of deaths in the Syrian conflict or in the refugee camps in Africa. The paralysis of the Security Council on certain issues can affect the prestige of the U.S. and Russia, but does not affect their populations directly.

¹² Carlos Perez Lllana, “Depolarization of International Politics,” *Foreign Policy*, Vol 21 No 4, 2013, p 65. In an article with Celso Lafer, attention is called to the fact that one of the consequences of the Cold War would be the articulation of a system with “undefined polarities.”

¹³ Josef Joffe, “Two Great Powers, No Real Leadership”, *Wall Street Journal*, June 17, 2013.

Is it possible to reverse the process, to increase the supply of multilateral security, and to strengthen the fundamentals of international responsibility in the order? Of course the answer is very speculative. Today, as stated, it seems the future will for some time, be a repetition of the present. On the horizon, one cannot see noteworthy movement to strengthen the prestige of the multilateral institutions that deal with security. But, in the context of the analysis that has been made so far, the path would be to study the perspective of the dynamics of the poles, which is particularly difficult because as we know, foreign policy options, contrary to what the realists say, do not depend exclusively on the position in the hierarchy of power.

Thus, for purely illustrative purposes, it is worth considering, as a first hypothesis (indeed the one to be recognized most easily), the rise of the new poles - the emerging countries. A positive scenario would presume not only their ascension, but their international conduct would serve to diminish friction and stimulate the strengthening of multilateral institutions. One example of an attempt to mitigate crises was the effort of Brazil and Turkey to reach an agreement on the nuclearization of Iran. It did not have immediate success, but serves as a model of possible gains from actions in multipolarity. On a more general level, the behaviour of some emerging powers, such as Brazil, India and South Africa (IBSA), could be more aimed at strengthening multilateralism, not only because they traditionally are organized in multilateral forums that allow for the possibility to comment on global issues. Hence the importance of a Security Council reform, to expand the legitimacy of the body, but above all to signal a new understanding of the international order itself. In other words, the international community recognizes the need to renew the mode of articulating new ways for resolving international crises.

Another way would be to change the conduct of the powers, adopting a more open attitude in multilateral institutions that articulate solutions to security crises. Which forces could determine this new attitude? Consider the example of the USA. It is unlikely to be internal forces, similar to the popular pressure exerted to end the war in Vietnam. Thus, it is more likely, in the face of impasses such as humanitarian tragedies which plague public opinion, that the U.S. would approach by parliamentary majorities in multilateral forums, as occurred in the case of the removal of Gaddafi; failure of unilateral solutions would be another factor favouring the use of multilateralism. The positive scenario is that the "multilateral conversion" of the U.S. would be achieved by the sum of marginal gains and not in a sudden and drastic way. There is no shortage of historic bills that defend robust multilateralism, yet which are then followed by attitudes and policies that run counter. In the current and foreseeable framework, poles, both traditional and emerging, can block the legitimacy of unilateral U.S. actions. On the positive side, this can increase the possibility of creating room for negotiations that serve both the U.S. and multilateral institutions. One should therefore imagine the advantages a simultaneous conversion to multilateralism would bring to the permanent members of the Council (and other influential powers), and imagine that they accept, not just from a national strategic perspective, but a perspective that is articulated based on universal interests negotiated in multilateral institutions and which would bring more stable foundations for international order. Here we would be closer to utopian thinking than realist; however, without a dose of the former, the prospects for transformation disappear.

Finally, to illustrate the relationship between globalization and the poles, it is worth reviving an observation from Richard Rosecrance. Commenting on the initiative for a free trade agreement between Europe and the United States, he clarifies that one of the goals is to “revive the West”, since such an agreement would have sound fundamentals in the political and strategic dimension and thus, would act as a counterweight to the growing power of China. Nevertheless, and here is where his observation becomes relevant to what we are discussing, “[t]he balance of power leads to conflict. But an overbalance attracts others to its economic core.”¹⁵ Rosecrance points out the multiple links between the U.S. and China and describes the paradox that globalization has created: more power at one pole may not mean more conflict but rather the opposite. “In the end, trade - not war - will attract others to the West’s economic core.” Alliances, ideological ones or the ones solely geared towards ensuring security, are characterized by the advantages of closer economic ties.

These summarizing observations are clearly insufficient to draw a more accurate picture of the future. They serve primarily to point to forces that may in some way enhance the “provisional multilateral offer” of security. In spite of paralysis in the face of specific crises, the discourse of the poles, both classic and traditional, is, not as a rule, a discourse that reveals structural antagonisms. The tribute to multilateral institutions continues to be provided and there is no proposal to diminish or weaken the UN. This is a modest signal, but in the present circumstances, still valuable.

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