



Israel Hernandez Seguin is the Deputy Director of the Mexican Council on Foreign Relations (Comexi), a premier think tank dedicated to the analysis and debate of global affairs, international relations and foreign policy. He frequently writes on international affairs in specialised magazines and newspapers and has been selected to participate in global initiatives on multicultural leadership.

World Politics of Security: Global Cooperation facing the Predominance of Geopolitics

Israel Hernández Seguin

Today's international system is said to suffer from a renewed uncertainty due to the lack of global hegemons. During the Cold War nations faced the prospect of (in the worst possible scenario) potential destruction as a product of a direct confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, or (as actually happened) of being saved from extinction as a consequence of mutual deterrence. In any case, the rules of the playing field were certain. Nowadays, even with a militarily undefeatable U.S., there is no such certainty anymore. The number of wars between States has diminished (76% lower than the average in the Cold War¹) but the world is not yet a safe place, which can be seen in the proliferation of internal violent conflicts².

Plenty of cooperation mechanisms aim to facilitate a cooperative dialogue among nations. Multilateralism has certainly allowed countries to work together on given issues; however, it still lacks the backbone to face the world's new global challenges. There has not been an efficient multilateral response to end the Syrian crisis, to fully maintain the UN arms embargo on Libya or to contain the Islamic State, to mention but a few examples.

Geopolitical calculations have hindered unabridged multilateral cooperation, especially in the collective security agenda. Moreover, as explained by game theory literature, no State wants to make the first move to cooperate or engage as it could lead other players to take

¹ Human Security Report Project. 2012. Human Security Report 2012. Vancouver: Human Security Press.

² Christopher A. Preble. 2014. *The most dangerous world ever?*, Washington: Cato Institute.

advantage of such an action. Nonetheless, this does not mean that multilateral cooperation in security affairs is unfeasible. Besides which, from a pragmatic point of view, cooperation is useful.

Challenges that nations face cannot be solved by traditional State-based policies, they require global actions. A more globalised and interdependent world has led to various positive social, economic, political and technological advances but it has also allowed for new modes of warfare and the proliferation of potentially volatile non-State actors to emerge. Consequently, domestic criminal groups have become transnational organised networks and the increasing integration between countries, communities and processes has led those criminal organisations to act with greater force and secure a greater reach. In view of this, international cooperation is ever more vital to address the new demands of a globalised world. This article suggests emerging powers (such as BRICS, MIKTA and similar groups) could play a more significant role in guaranteeing that multilateralism works more effectively regarding the global security agenda. By working together with developed nations traditionally supportive of international cooperation, this objective becomes more feasible.

In the first section of this article, a discussion of geopolitics unfolds. The argument is that States still follow a realist perspective in the International System, planning their actions as strategic moves to increase their relative power. This can be seen in two cases: the developments that ended up with Russia's annexation of Crimea and the situation in the South China Sea. Elements from game theory structure the analysis. In the second section, and in contrast with a pure realist view of international affairs, the article shows that cooperation is useful in a context of globalised problems and challenges. In view of the importance of increasing cooperation on geopolitical interests, the article proposes that a cooperation framework between emerging countries and developed nations – the latter being those that traditionally tend to favour multilateralism – could help advance the collective security agenda.

Geopolitics of Security: what's implied?

Geopolitical calculations and tactics have always prevailed. There is no such thing as a return of geopolitics but new players in the field. It is today more difficult for traditional players to act. Recent events have shown that geopolitical interests have to be re-considered. This can explain Russia's aggressive actions in Eastern Europe or the tense situation in the South China Sea. Together, geopolitical analysis and game theory are theoretical frameworks that can help to explain States' behaviour when it comes to the international security agenda.

Geopolitics is the study of geography and its relation with political power. This discipline analyses States' strategies to dominate natural resources and strategic geographical space as sources of power³. Colin Flint proposes that States develop a "geopolitical code" as the area where they have influence. Furthermore they make decisions to expand their code⁴.

³ Bert Chapman, *Geopolitics: a guide to the issues*, California: Praeger, 2011, pp. 4-5.

⁴ Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 47.

Hans Morgenthau, the father of realism and the United States' advisor after World War II, highlighted the importance of geopolitics for the role of a State in the international system. He identified State characteristics such as geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness, population, national character, national morale, the quality of diplomacy, and the quality of government⁵ as elements of national power. These were key elements that would help a State in the struggle for power and that were crucial to maintain its national security.⁶

Some analysts argue that we are witnessing the return of geopolitics from its retreat since the Cold War. Carl Marklund, however, argues that geoeconomics, geopolitics and grand strategies have not been dismissed in the post-Cold War analysis of international relations⁷. Meanwhile, Hans Peters defines game theory as “a formal, mathematical discipline which studies situations of competition and cooperation between several involved parties”⁸. This theory develops scenarios where different players, in varying situations, make choices to act in particular ways in a context in which all other players are also searching for their own satisfaction. The players make rational decisions to achieve their objectives. The prisoner's dilemma model allows for the analysis of situations in which countries interact. Cooperation between States in this model is explained as a “coordination game” where players try to anticipate and take advantage of the strategy of their counterparts so as to obtain the best possible outcome⁹.

When it comes to the security agenda, geopolitical analysis and game theory are theoretical frameworks that can explain States' behaviour. In the two main cases explored in this article, all players involved have taken actions based on strategic calculations, which explain how things have evolved in each respective region. In neither case has multilateral cooperation been efficient or even taken into account.

Considering firstly Russia's annexation of Crimea: since the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the USSR, Russia has always denied Western intervention inside the ex-soviet sphere. Some experts feel that this is what led President Putin to proclaim war against Georgia and to proceed to the annexation of Crimea¹⁰. It all started in 2008 when the Czech Republic allowed the U.S. government to install its defence missile system supposedly to protect against a potential threat from Iran or North Korea¹¹. This act was seen by Moscow as a direct threat to the integrity of the Russian sphere of influence. It was again repeated when Georgia started the process of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in the same year¹². Some analysts have argued

⁵ Francis P. Sempa, “Hans Morgenthau and the Balance of Power in Asia”. *The Diplomat*, May 25th, 2015.

⁶ Karen Mingst, *Fundamentos de las Relaciones Internacionales*, CIDE: México, 2009.

⁷ Carl Marklund, *The return of Geopolitics in the Era of Soft Power: Rereading Rudolf Kjellén on Geopolitical imaginary and competitive identity*, Taylor & Francis Ltd., Num .20 (Spring 2014), pp. 249-251.

⁸ Hans Peters, *Game theory: a multi-leveled approach*, Maastricht: Springer, 2008, p. 1.

⁹ George Ehrhardt, *Beyond the Prisoner's' Dilemma: Making Game Theory a Useful Part of Undergraduate International Relations Classes*, *International Studies Perspectives*, No. 9, (Winter 2008), pp. 57-74.

¹⁰ Nikolas Gvosdev, *The ultimate game of chicken: The west vs Russia*, *The National Interest*, Diplomacy, April 17, 2015.

¹¹ Judy Dempsey and Dan Bilefsky, *Czechs, Disliking Role, Pull Out of U.S. Missile Defense Project*, *New York Times*, June 15th 2011.

¹² Sophia Kishkovsky, *Georgia is warned by Russia against plans to join NATO*, *New York Times*, June 17th, 2008.

that the war between Russia and Georgia was the result of Moscow trying to keep this Western military organisation away from its borders, and also to maintain the control over the ex-soviet country¹³.

In 2011, as an attempt to avoid the Ukraine's incorporation into the West, Vladimir Putin forced Viktor Yanukovich, then President of the Ukraine, to reject an economic deal with the European Union. It can be argued that the Russian Federation could not allow itself to lose control over the country where most of its gas pipelines transit, as well as to lose influence over an important geopolitical pivot that connects Europe with Asia. As Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former national security advisor to Jimmy Carter, from 1977 to 1981, wrote in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, "Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire."¹⁴ By highlighting the importance of the Ukraine and, in a wider sense, of Eurasia, as the field in which the struggle to achieve global primacy would continue to be played, Brzezinski uttered an early warning. The risk he warned against was that of Russia's regaining control over the Ukraine and recovering access to the Black Sea and, therefore, becoming a once-more powerful state with influence in both Eastern Europe and Asia.

It was not a real surprise when the annexation of the Crimean province occurred, flaunting international law. This geopolitical strategy gave Moscow access to the sea at Sevastopol (Russia's Black Sea Fleet) via which it is now capable of addressing naval threats from other states, as well as the Mediterranean, the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans¹⁵

Considering secondly the situation in the South China Sea: another geopolitical chessboard. China together with Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan have all claimed their territorial sovereignty of the area. Each country pursues different strategic objectives. According to the World Bank, the South China Sea holds extensive oil reserves of at least 7 billion barrels and 900 trillion cubic feet of natural resources. It is no wonder that small countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia see this as an economic opportunity for development, while China sees it as an opportunity for energy security¹⁶.

Since its economic reform in 1978¹⁷, China has improved its industry and has become the world's second largest economy. Today, as a great economic power, it is a priority for China to ensure two things: on the one hand, increased access to raw materials and, on the other hand, secured shipping routes. Around 50% of *global oil tanker shipments* pass through the South China Sea¹⁸. In addition, two thirds of South Korea's

¹³ Gopi Chandra Kharel, *New Russian invasion from Southern Front Rattles West*, International Business Times, August 28th, 2014.

¹⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, Basic Books, 1997.

¹⁵ Paul N Schwartz. 2014. "Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia", CSIS.

¹⁶ Robert D. Kaplan, "The South China Sea will be the battleground of the future", Business Insider, Feb 21st, 2015.

¹⁷ Bruce L. Reynolds, *Chinese economic reform: How far, how fast?*, Boston: Academic Press, 1988, 1-8.

¹⁸ Beina Xu, *South China Sea Tensions*, Council on Foreign Relations: 2014.

energy supplies, nearly 60 percent of Japan's and Taiwan's energy supplies, and 80 percent of China's crude oil imports transit through this area¹⁹.

China's interests are obstructed by the U.S., which is determined to limit China's increasing power, an aim which finds supporters in Japan, Taiwan and Australia. The containment of China is part of the South China Sea neighbourhood's agenda. This can be seen in the "string of pearls" strategy implemented by the U.S., Australia and Japan, that strives to cut China off from its access to vital raw materials, which it would access mainly via its oil corridors to the Middle East and Africa; by increasing U.S. military navy and air presence across and over the South China Sea, in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam, China finds its access to needed external natural resources constrained.²⁰ The stated motive of this strategy is "to protect freedom of navigation" but the reality is that the U.S. government may see China's increasing capabilities as potentially destabilising to the regional military balance, risking, thus, increased regional tensions and anxieties. However, to counter this strategy, China is itself steadily growing its military power and building artificial islands nearby the Spratly island chain to secure its position in the region.²¹

It is worth noting that most South China Sea disputes are based on the importance of the Spratly Islands. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines are all concerned about reclaiming sovereignty over these islands due to their strategic location. Not only is the area rich in natural gas and oil²², but the islands' location is also useful, being in the middle of the South China Sea, giving whichever nation that controls them the simultaneous advantage of controlling the movement of vessels, as well as aircraft and maritime trading routes in the area. No form of multilateral negotiation or mediation has, as yet, been effective in solving the dispute over the South China Sea islands. Even after the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea was adopted in 2002²³ to guarantee peace and stability in the maritime territory, little progress towards conflict-resolution was made. Involved countries have focussed on following their national interests and attempting to increase their access to resources and maritime power. The interests of Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan and Indonesia regarding the Spratly and Paracel islands are all of import when it comes to the evolutions of the South China Sea power game. Nevertheless it is U.S. involvement that makes this conflict more complex. The U.S. has tried to constrain China's power by backing up the territorial claims of both the Philippines and of Vietnam, raising the conflict to a different platform.

¹⁹ Kaplan, *ibid.*

²⁰ F. William Engdhal, *Obama's Geopolitical China "Pivot"*, Frankfurt: Voltaire Network, 2012.

²¹ Joel Guinto, "China builds artificial islands in South China Sea", Bloomberg, June 19th, 2014.

²² Kaplan, *ibid.*

²³ ASEAN Briefing. "ASEAN Update: Understanding the Geopolitics of the South China Sea Dispute".

The Need for Cooperation: a pragmatic View

For realists, the international system remains in an anarchical stage where States have to protect their national interests in their constant struggle for power. However, in the context of globalisation, transnational challenges require multilateral cooperation for solutions to be effective. Global security challenges have grown, leaving countries with a diminished capacity to tackle them unilaterally. Today transnational criminal organisations have access to modern technology and are quite easily able to expand their operations worldwide. Added to this, difficulties such as internal conflicts in failed States force populations to flee their countries of origin, disrupting security in their respective regions if not globally, as well as leaving the initial failed state as a potential paradise for terrorists.

From a utilitarian point of view, cooperation seems to be the best solution for maintaining international security. Donald H. Regan coined the term “cooperative utilitarianism” to define a new strategy in which a group can generate optimum results for both the group and each member²⁴. Cooperative utilitarianism claims that when others are cooperative, each party then strives to act in the optimal manner with both its own and the group’s interests. This of course only holds as long as States are genuinely interested in acting as a group.

It is true that States often have plenty of reasons not to cooperate with each other. Nonetheless, it is rational for States to prefer the outcome of universal contribution over that of universal non-contribution, since the difficulties and damages of the latter far outweigh those of the former. Thus, by applying cooperative utilitarianism to international relations, States could, in any given situation, achieve the best possible outcome not only as a group, but also individually. Following this line of thought, States ought to embrace “security cooperation” as a strategy to accomplish their national interests.

In order to avoid coordination problems that could lead to failed cooperation, States must act as collective agents²⁵. This means that it is necessary for them to understand that the collectivity is made up of a complex conjunction of the intentions of each member state. Ergo, States must be cognizant of the idea that the final objective of security cooperation is not the sum of each national interest, but a new framework addressing the concerns and needs of the collectivity, shared by all members.

²⁴ Christopher Woodward, *Reasons, Patterns and Cooperation*, New York: Routledge, 2008.

²⁵ Simon Rosenqvist, *Collective Consequentialism*, Lund Universitij Publications: Sweden, 2012.

Cooperation between emerging Countries and developed Nations: overcoming pure geopolitical Calculations

After World War II, security cooperation was a main concern in the global agenda. The United Nations – and the Security Council in particular – were, supposedly, to be rooted on the idea of collective security. According to the principle of collective security, one of the main liberal ideas at the core of Woodrow Wilson’s idealist agenda, war would be prevented by containing States’ military and nuclear capacities. And in the case of aggression, there would be a unified response against the aggressor²⁶. Notwithstanding these ideals, the idea of collective security has not always worked, since not all countries are willing to act as a unified entity. Reasons for this reluctance come from the pursuit of national interests or the associated costs of engaging in international security operations²⁷. Karen Mingst, in her book *Essentials in International Relations*, gives two examples of the failure of collective security and explains the reasons for it: “Collective Security does not always work. In the period between the two World Wars, Japan invaded Manchuria and Italy overran Ethiopia. In neither case did other states act as if it were in their collective interest to respond [...] In this instance, collective security did not work because of lack of commitment on the part of other States and an unwillingness of the International Community to act in concert”²⁸.

Despite the failures of collective security, this concept is still relevant in the international system of today. It prevails as an overarching goal in the discourse of the UN and that of many of its members, and it is unlikely to disappear anytime soon. However, so far this concept has been approached from a perspective which comprises the notion of developed countries providing assistance to developing countries.

During the end of the 20th, and at the beginning of the 21st century, most of the global agenda was driven by North-South relations. This meant that the very notion of security cooperation implied industrialised nations (mostly Western Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries) providing assistance to developing nations. The key concerns of this cooperation were poverty alleviation, democratic strengthening and issues related to human development and stability of institutions, generally. Security collaboration meant that developing nations were supposed to receive training and financial aid. There are plenty of examples of this type of approach, such as the Central America Regional Strategy Paper 2007-2013, a cooperation agreement signed by the European Commission and Central America, in which one of the three priorities of the European Union was the reinforcement of regional governance and security²⁹. Another example is that of the Merida Initiative, launched by the U.S., which included not only financial aid but also police training and arms supplies to Mexico. Yet even if this form of security assistance may still have a role to play in international security strategies, results have been slightly wanting: being neither completely beneficial, nor entirely effective.

²⁶ Karen Mingst, *Fundamentos de las Relaciones Internacionales*, México: CIDE, 2009.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ José E Durán Lima, et.al, *Latin America-European Union: A partnership for development*, Chile: ECLAC, 2014.

The reason behind this failure lays in the lack of cooperation frameworks able to adjust to the new context of the international scenario. Traditional powers no longer need to play a leading role. New players, namely emerging countries, need to seriously and significantly participate in the decision-making process. Without such a structure, the new multipolar international community cannot adequately face global challenges.

At the beginning of the 21st century, countries like Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa accounted for 9% of the world's aggregate GDP; in 2009 this figure increased to 14%³⁰. Today, other emerging countries, such as Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Turkey also play a major role – both on the wider international stage and also in their respective regions. The importance these emerging countries gained as global economic and political players led to the creation of the G20; and therefore, to greater participation in setting the global agenda.

On account of these changes in the international system, traditional North-South relations appear to be outdated³¹. With the increasing participation of emerging countries in the international arena, the way to face global challenges must shift into a “new bargain” that involves emerging and developed countries on an equal footing. This means that the new global agenda should not operate upon the old basis of “North-South assistance”, but rather on one of cooperation amongst equals who are seeking to achieve their common interests. Emerging nations have realised that they have a key role to play in the international system and have attempted to create alliances to face global challenges in a cooperative manner, including as regards security cooperation. An illustration of this is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, formed by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with minor participation from India and Pakistan as observers. This regional organisation focusses on combatting terrorism, separatism and extremism. Other partnerships among emerging countries, such as the MIKTA or BRICS groupings, address for the most part economic issues. MIKTA is mostly focussed on promoting free trade and democracy, whilst the BRICS, although predominantly addressing trade, technology and agriculture, have also paid some attention to security cooperation. The BRICS High Representatives Responsible for Security meet annually since 2009 to exchange views on cybersecurity, counterterrorism, transportation security, and regional crises. This said, there have not yet been any substantial results in the form of measures taken as a consequence of these meetings³².

It is true that traditional great powers are aware of emerging countries' role in matters pertaining to the global security agenda. Nonetheless, little has been done in terms of multilateral cooperation; instead, developed countries keep negotiating through bilateral relations. For instance, the EU has partnerships with each BRICS member country but has not attempted any treaty or negotiation with the alliance itself³³.

³⁰ IPEA, 2014. “Learn about BRICS”.

³¹ Christine Hackensch and Janus Heiner, *Post-2015: how emerging economies shape the relevance of a new agenda*, Bonn: German Development Institute, 2013.

³² BRICS Ministry of External Relations. “Main areas and topics of dialogue between the BRICS”.

³³ EUROSTAT. “The European Union and the BRIC countries”. Belgium, 2012.

These cases illustrate that even when new cooperation fora exist between emerging countries, a strong framework of security cooperation has not yet been instituted. Indeed, since the 20th century's post-war era in which collective security and security assistance were developed as global policies, these strategies have failed to build a secure international system. So the question is now which security cooperation strategy ought best be promoted.

The answer depends on the ability of countries to realise that in order to achieve security-related common interests, they must approach multilateral negotiations with the joint and equal participation of developed and developing nations. This form of participation would lead both North and South to achieve consensus in an efficient and beneficial manner for every member of the international community. As previously mentioned, to successfully cooperate, the collectivity must be made up by a complex conjunction of the intentions of each individual member; in other words, national interests from each country should converge in order to create a new global security strategy.

Conclusions

By way of this analysis it can be observed that security cooperation and the pursuit of national interests need not be mutually exclusive. The South China Sea conflict and the Crimea crisis are illustrations of the fact that the international system remains driven by geopolitical strategies and that countries' predominant goal is that of increasing their own power. However, even when the realist theory seems to prevail, there are other factors at play such as globalisation and increasing interdependence between nations that reaffirm the need for cooperation in the security arena, as in all other areas of the global agenda.

Collective security as traditionally envisioned and security assistance have failed to achieve their purpose. On the one hand, collective security has failed because national interests drive the actions of States in the international system; consequently, security cooperation lacks mechanisms to effectively enforce unified strategies. On the other hand, security assistance, in which developing countries receive financial aid and/or military capacitation from developed nations, has not substantially improved global security; in fact, quite contrary to what was expected, it has even caused damaging results to the developing countries that receive it by making them assistance-dependent or bound to conditionalities in such a way as to reinforce traditional hierarchies between North and South.

With emerging countries gaining increasing weight in the economic and political dimensions of the global agenda, the third alternative for ensuring international security lies with multilateral cooperation. With the participation of both emerging and developed countries, a consensus can be reached by achieving a convergence of States' national interests around shared challenges; this form of equal and updated cooperation may be able to produce optimal results for the international community as a whole, as well as for each member State in particular. Cooperation is difficult to achieve in spite of its positive results as compared to purely realist world-views; setting up multilateral

frameworks that allow for increased dialogue on security matters between emerging countries and developed nations may be the first step towards this complex goal. In this sense, a more substantive dialogue between the European Union and countries such as Brazil or Mexico may have a significant and positive impact in generating a new perspective on global security cooperation.

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