

AGOSTO 2021**Reasons for Russia's War on Ukraine and its foreseeable
consequences on Latin America***Lila Roldán Vázquez*

Abstract: This article analyzes the historical and political reasons that, in the author's opinion, have led to the war unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. It is also its purpose to analyze the war's immediate and mediate impacts at the international level, as well as its eventual consequences in the Latin American region.

Key words: Ukraine, Russian Federation, Latin America and the Caribbean, war, History, politics, international peace and security, economy.

Introduction

13.000 km away from our country, a ruthless and unjustified war has been unleashed on European soil after decades of continental peace. A war that violates all the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular the preservation of international peace and security and respect for human rights.

Against any rational consideration in terms of geopolitics and in the 21st century, President Vladimir Putin has unleashed a military invasion against a neighboring country –it can no longer be called a “brother country”–, based on fragile historical and national security reasons, pursuing “strategic” objectives that mutate as days go by.

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Reasons for the war

Conquering Ukraine and re-incorporating it into “Mother Russia” has been a long-cherished dream of Vladimir Putin. The Russian ruler never fully accepted the disintegration of the Soviet Union –from which Ukraine was a fundamental component– and he expressed it clearly in 2005, calling it “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”¹.

At that time, however, the reincorporation of Ukraine was still a dream that he sensed would be difficult to achieve, and he had recognized it before by declaring that “Whoever does not want to recover the Soviet Union has no heart; whoever tries to do it has no brain”.

Fifteen years later, it seems that his heart has prevailed over his brain.

His war campaign today does not arise, however, from an emotional impulse: it is the result –strategically wrong or not– of careful planning and power building, at a national and international level, frequently supported by fortuitous events that he knew how to take advantage of.

On top of Putin’s personal illusion, there is a traditional Russian perception about the fragility of the nation’s borders, accentuated these last few years by the Ukrainian interest in joining

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is worthwhile to make a parenthesis here: at the moment of the Crimea’s annexation, on March 2014, Ukraine was a neutral country. Moreover, it also enjoyed the guarantees given by the United States, Great Britain, the Russian Federation, China and France through the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, by which those countries –including the present aggressor– engaged themselves in protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders –which included the Crimea².

After the Crimea’s annexation and the conflict in the Donbass with Russia supporting the rebels there, Ukraine decided to abandon its neutrality status and began to look for its integration into NATO with greater interest. However, there were no decisive actions in this regard on the part of the Atlantic Organization; until today, Ukraine has not been offered the Action Plan for its eventual accession. In the first place, because consensus among all the members of the Organization to advance in this direction has not yet been reached; and, on the other hand, neither Georgia nor Ukraine meet yet the requirements for accession, since NATO

cannot incorporate a country with territorial conflicts in its territory.

This brings us to another of the reasons invoked by President Putin for invading Ukraine: Russia's grievances over NATO expansion and the threat it poses to his country. Furthermore, the Russian government claims that senior NATO officials promised former President Gorbachev that the Organization would not extend "one inch" to the east. The West denies this claim, since there are no documents or written commitments to support it. The truth, as often happens, would be somewhere in the middle: according to recently declassified secret documents, it would seem that there were indeed some informal talks between German and American officials with their Russian counterparts, as well as a demand from Gorbachev that NATO not expand eastward. Some authors indicate that Gorbachev himself would later have accepted the state of affairs without demanding a written commitment, and others even affirm that the talks referred exclusively to Germany, which was the object of negotiations at that time, and not to the Organization as a whole.

There is another very important and more urgent reason that drives Putin in his attempt to subjugate Ukraine: this is an independent and

democratic country, undoubtedly with the imperfections that characterize many democracies in the world, but it is nonetheless a real democracy, which aspires to share Western values and defends its preferences and civic decisions. Ukraine is the only ex-Soviet country that rose twice in popular revolutions: the first, the Orange Revolution in 2004, was born from disregard to the popular will and the fraud in the presidential elections of that year; in the second, the Euro-Maidan Revolution or Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014, the trigger was the refusal of the then President Yanukovich to sign a Cooperation Agreement with the European Union, in a climate of popular indignation due to high corruption and poor government performance. This characteristic of the Ukrainian people, which is demonstrated today in all its breadth in the resistance to the Russian invasion, can constitute a real threat of "contagion" for the autocratic Putin regime.

Since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, slowly and largely thanks to the brutal second war on Chechnia in 2000, the war against Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea and support for separatists from eastern Ukraine from 2014, the interventions in Syria

and other African countries and the positioning of peacekeeping troops in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian Federation has been recovering a leading role on the international scene.

In that long journey, the dream of a Ukraine integrated with Russia was always present and manifested itself in various ways: both in the permanent interference in the internal affairs of the country, through pro-Russian political leaders and parties whose political campaigns and maintenance in power were financed by Moscow (i.e. ex-Presidents Kuchma and Yanukovich, the Party of Regions), as in the energy and commercial negotiations in which the Russian Federation imposed the terms of trade; or in the maintenance of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukrainian territory through leasing, until the annexation of Crimea.

Immediate background

In April 2021, Russian troops in combat exercises began massing on the border with Ukraine. In July of the same year, President Putin published an extensive manifesto: “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”, in which he unraveled his own version of History and the elements that would essentially serve as a foundation for his claims on the neighboring country³.

In December 2021, Vladimir Putin sent to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and to the United States government, two requests –in the form of treaties– with the aim of reformulating of the European security architecture. In these texts, Russia demanded that Ukraine never be a NATO member and that the Organization’s borders go back to those existing in 1997, before the incorporation of Eastern European countries, some of them former members of the USSR. Other demands consisted of the lifting of US military bases and those of other NATO members in territories that Putin considers to be within the Russian sphere of influence – such as Ukraine itself, the Caucasus and Central Asia– as well as other measures relating to the Euro-Atlantic security structure. Both proposals were rejected.

Meanwhile, from the end of 2021 to January 2022, more than 150.000 Russian troops, with their respective military equipments, had positioned along the Russian-Ukrainian border; and joint Russian-Belarusian military exercises began in early February, in the northern border of Ukraine. On Sunday, February 20, the Russian Federation and Belarus announced that such exercises would continue indefinitely. On Monday the 21st,

President Putin, accompanied by the leaders of the self-proclaimed separatist republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, officially announced the recognition of both pseudo-republics, whose formation and maintenance he had supported since 2014.

It was expected that, as in the Crimea, a referendum would be held a short time later and the annexation of these pseudo-republics to the Russian Federation would be requested. However, there was no time for it: three days later, on February 24th, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine: not only the territory occupied by the Ukrainian rebels, but with attacks on all regions of the country, including its capital Kyiv.

The use of force in domestic and foreign policy has been a mark since the first days of his administration: the brutality of the repression and the complete destruction of Grozny during the second war in Chechnya, under his command, was one of the first examples of this policy. Putin demonstrated there that he could be implacable in the face of “subversion of the established order” internally, as later, during the war with Georgia in August 2008, promoting and consolidating the partition of that country, with the dismemberment of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 by the “little green men” –which Putin later

recognized were Russian soldiers without insignia⁴ and the armed support of rebels in the eastern regions of Ukraine, where he eventually recognized the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, were new evidences of that policy of armed. In 2020, Russia intervened in the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh by sending “peacekeepers” that continue to be stationed and operational to this day, as do the Russian forces in Transnistria.

Outside the region, Russia’s participation in the civil war in Syria –another humanitarian catastrophe which resulted in the total destruction of the city of Aleppo–, as well as the sale of weapons arms and military cooperation in African countries, demonstrated President Putin’s determination to expand and consolidate the international position of the Russian Federation and –from his point of view– to recover the prestige lost in recent decades.

This foreign policy objective was clearly expressed by President Putin on numerous occasions and supported by constitutional amendments and immigration policies adopted during his term: the declarations on the dissolution of the Soviet Union and on the

threats to Russian security represented by the expansion of NATO, or the constitutional amendments of 2020 to allow the intervention of the Russian government in the protection of Russian citizens “wherever they are”, while Russian passports are distributed in conflict zones and in neighboring countries.

Western reaction

What is surprising about the Russian aggression against Ukraine is not only the scale of the attack ordered by President Vladimir Putin, but also the fact that the West has not been able to foresee such aggression, despite the numerous signs that it must have perceived or correctly evaluated in more than twenty years of exercise of power by the Russian president.

Despite the signals issued by Vladimir Putin, Western countries did not react appropriately. Neither in the face of the destruction in Chechnya, nor in the face of the war in Georgia, nor in the face of the annexation of Crimea and the open military and political support for rebels in Donbass. And in these last cases, despite the commitments assumed by some of them in the Budapest Memorandum for the defense of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. They limited themselves to promoting condemnatory resolutions within the United

Nations and to applying sanctions to the Russian Federation, which were not sufficiently dissuasive.

Until the large-scale war –and not limited to two provinces in Ukraine– reached the European soil. It was only then that European states applied harsher sanctions to the Russian Federation, its leaders, oligarchs and companies, led to international condemnation and marked isolation of the Russian government, and offered economic aid and military equipment to Ukraine. They have not, however, committed a direct participation in the conflict, for fear of a broader conflagration.

The effects of the Russian invasion are perceived this time not only in the support measures for Ukraine, but also in the unity of the Western front and in the strengthening of the defense systems of the European countries, which have increased their budgets in that area. The cases of Germany, which for the first time has sent military defense material to another country since the Second World War, thus modifying its traditional policy of non-intervention and the initiative of Finland and Sweden, two traditionally neutral countries, to apply for NATO’s membership, are especially noteworthy.

The distortion of History

In his justification for the military actions he has ordered against the Ukrainian state, Putin makes a serious distortion of the history of both countries and their bilateral relations and even denies the existence of the Ukrainian nation and culture.

The history of Ukraine, which begins approximately three centuries before the history of Russia, has been closely linked to that of its neighboring country. Both nations recognize Kievan Rus', founded in 885, as the religious and political center, and fundamental point of departure of their respective peoples. Moscow and Saint Petersburg, founded respectively in 1147 and 1703, subsequently concentrated the military and administrative power of the Tsarist Empire and then of the Soviet Union, which always sought to exercise their domination over Ukraine.

Throughout its history, the Ukrainian people had to resist various invasions by predominant powers: Poland, the Duchy of Lithuania, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia, all of which repeatedly divided its territory. In 1917, in the turmoil created by the Bolshevik Revolution, Ukraine managed to achieve its first independence, before falling back under Russian rule. During that brief period from 1918 to 1921,

several countries recognized its independence, including Argentina, the only Latin American country to do so.

Ukraine was a fundamental piece of the Soviet Union: it was both one of its founding members and the one that led to its dissolution in 1991, which was finalized with the signing of an agreement between Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. It was a founding member of the United Nations and its nationals played a leading role in the Soviet Union's management. The country was also strategic from other points of view: as the USSR's breadbasket, as the seat of the Union's most significant technological and military developments, or even as the training center for the scientific and political elites in its universities.

However, President Putin ignores these facts and qualifies Ukraine as a part of Russian people, as "little Russia", differentiated from the "great Russia" based in Moscow. He does not recognize the distinct identity of the Ukrainian people and culture, nor the existence of the Ukrainian state as an independent nation. He has even placed the responsibility for its estrangement on the Soviet leaders who "built it", concluding that today's Ukraine is "entirely a product of the

Soviet era” and that, consequently, “Russia has been robbed”⁵.

To these structural reasons are added the conjunctural factors –and opportunities– which generally end up defining a political action of this magnitude. President Putin’s decline in Russian public opinion in the last months of 2021 to the lowest level reached in long tenure, coupled with the apparent fragility of President Joe Biden in the United States of America and President Zelenskiy in Ukraine, as well as the weakening of the Euro-Atlantic structures by the policies of former President Trump, shaped, in Vladimir Putin’s opinion, the appropriate framework to launch his military actions against Ukraine.

War actions that have meant a true cataclysm in the international order, due to the extent and depth of its consequences. The war in Ukraine constitutes a global geopolitical upheaval and the probable rearrangement of many variables on the international scene.

Immediately, its impact reaches several spheres: humanitarian, political, economic, military and international structures.

On a humanitarian level, in less than two months the war has caused thousands of lives to be lost on both sides, including Russian and Ukrainian soldiers and Ukrainian civilians; the

United Nations Organization estimates the number of refugees who have left Ukraine at more than 5 million and around 7 million internally displaced persons to flee the most critical points of the conflict –to which must be added the more than 1.500.000 internally displaced since the beginning of the war in the Donbass in 2014–; the hundreds of Ukrainians deported to Russian territory, including many children, orphans, thousands of injured and people who have lost their homes.

These effects of the war are already having consequences, which will surely last for a long time, in the relations between two peoples united by many ties in common: similar languages, shared traditions, many ties of kinship, neighborhood and friendship. If Putin’s purpose was to integrate Ukraine into Russia as part of his people, ignoring its national identity, he has obtained exactly the opposite: a deep resentment of the Ukrainian people, even in the regions bordering Russia with greater Russian influence, which will be very difficult to overcome.

Politically, we are witnessing an unprecedented international isolation of Putin’s government, which has been subject to more than 5.500 sanctions so far, surpassing

any other country that has received international sanctions, and a consequent hardening of the regime's policies to suppress freedom of expression and communication. In parallel, there has been a consolidation of the Euro-Atlantic front under the impetus of the US president and the firm commitment of practically all its leaders –with the sole exception, albeit nuanced, of Hungary, which hinders its position within the European Union. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldavia have urgently renewed their demand to integrate the EU and the distrust of former Soviet Union countries – the Baltic States, Poland, Moldavia, Georgia– has deepened, since they consider their security to be threatened by possible advances by the Russian Federation.

From the economic point of view, the effects of the war are not limited to the two countries directly involved, in one case due to the devastating effects of bombing and massive destruction of cities and infrastructure and in the other due to international sanctions: the expansive wave reaches the international economy as a whole, particularly in the area of food security –due to the leading role of Russia and Ukraine in the export of grains and cereals (40 % of the world's total amount), affecting markets, growth prospects and life expectancies

in the most dependent countries, with fewer resources for food production (in Africa).

On April 2022, the Director of the World Monetary Fund, Krystalina Georgieva, announced a slowdown in world growth from an estimated 6,1 % for 2021 to 3,6 % in 2022 and 2023; beyond 2023, global growth would slow to around 3.3 % in the medium term. Projected inflation for 2022 is 5,7 % in advanced economies and 8,7 % in emerging markets and developing economies; that is, 1.8 and 2.8 percentage points more than what was projected in January⁶.

It will be also interesting to observe the development of the efforts already launched by European countries largely dependent on Russian gas and oil supplies, to reduce or eliminate that dependence in the future.

In the defense field, NATO –whose weakening is one of Putin's main objectives– has regained a leading role and, as indicated above, traditionally neutral countries such as Finland and Sweden are considering joining the Organization. Germany, in a very important shift in its foreign and defense policy, has decided to increase its budget for defense spending by 2 % –in accordance with NATO requirements– and is providing military defense material to the Ukrainian government.

Other European countries are also increasing their respective defense budgets and most NATO members are participating in the supply of weapons and equipment to Ukraine.

As for international organizations, which have so far been unable to go beyond condemning the Russian Federation in the framework of the United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Council, it will be essential to consider a serious evaluation of their objectives and its structures and modes of operation. Particularly with regard to the UN Security Council, since one of its permanent Members with a right to veto has started the war in Ukraine and has prevented any initiative aimed at the application of mechanisms to safeguard international peace and security, which is the Council's main objective. This reform is even more urgent considering that the attitude of the Russian Federation, similar to that of other powers with a permanent seat on the Council, is part of what unfortunately already constitutes a tradition in that body, to the detriment of the rest of the members of the international community.

The war in Ukraine, which has destabilized the international chessboard and weakened trust among nations, is also a reflection of a broader conflict between Russia –in its successive incarnations of government– and the West and,

more generally, between liberalism and illiberalism, between liberal democracies and autocracies, in the context of a world undergoing structural changes.

The communiqué signed by the presidents of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China a few days before the invasion is a good example of this. In the communiqué, both leaders declared "A nation can choose such forms and methods of implementing democracy that would better suit its particular state..." and that they stand against "attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions, intend to counter interferences by outside forces, in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext, oppose colour revolutions, and will increase cooperation in the aforementioned areas"⁷.

Effects in Latin America and the Caribbean

We already mentioned that the war in Ukraine, which is taking place at 13.000 km away, far from our Continent, will affect not only the countries directly involved, but will have an impact at a global level. Latin America and the Caribbean as a region, and several of its countries at the national level

will surely not be an exception and will probably be affected in more ways than one.

The economic effects of the war, in particular the drop in world growth expectations and the increase in inflation, will have repercussions in our countries, characterized in general by fragile economies and variable economic policies.

Considering the productive profile of the countries of the region and of the countries directly involved in the conflict, Russia and Ukraine, there are at least three relevant commodities in common: wheat, corn and sunflower oil; and an industrial product on which agricultural production strongly depends: fertilizers, whose main exporters to the region are precisely Russia and Ukraine.

Reductions in the supply of fertilizers will affect agricultural production, the backbone of the economy of several countries in the region. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Peru have a high dependency; the first two have already begun negotiations with other fertilizer exporting countries, such as the United States and Canada, to make up for the lack of these essential products for the cultivation of agricultural goods. The government of Peru has declared a state of food emergency, which will allow the reallocation of budget items and taxes to subsidies for the purchase of fertilizers. Brazil

and Colombia, embarked on presidential campaigns, have already included the issue of agricultural production and food security in their respective electoral platforms.

If production declines occur, the food supply from Latin America to the world may be altered and this will have a negative impact on a global scale. At the regional level, there could also be shortages and likely price increases in the food chain. Considering that, historically, increases in food and transport prices have been the cause of social protest movements, this could have significant political consequences in a context of economies already weakened by the Covid-19 pandemic and by high inflation.

These general assessments of the economic consequences of the conflict for most of the countries in the region –with the nuances of each economy– cannot be applied in the same way to the political consequences that could arise from the war in Ukraine.

The disparity of regimes and political orientations of the Latin American and Caribbean governments does not allow us to imagine common or concerted reactions to the conflict. The polarization and consequent lack of political agreement that have characterized the region in the last two

decades have had a negative impact on multilateral –regional and sub-regional– organizations, have impeded the appropriate defense of common interests and have weakened the image and the position of Latin America and the Caribbean on the international scene.

This situation was clearly reflected both in the public declarations of its leaders and in the votes on the issue within the United Nations, where some countries condemned the Russian aggression and others abstained or justified it. This could be part of one of the foreseeable consequences of Russia’s war in Ukraine, which is the return to the spheres of power in the world, and would mean the abandonment of the non-alignment policy to which the region traditionally adhered.

Indeed, in the votes held at the United Nations on two Draft Resolutions, the first condemning the Russian Federation for its aggression against a neighboring country, violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity (A/RES/ES-11/1; 3/2/2022), and the second of a humanitarian nature (A/RES/ER-11/2; 3/24/2022), four countries in the region abstained: Bolivia, Cuba, El Salvador and Nicaragua (Venezuela absent in both votes, Dominica in the second)⁸.

In the same sphere, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua voted against the General Assembly Resolution

(A/RES/ES-11/3) suspending the participation of Russia in the UN Human Rights Council and various countries of the region voted in abstention: Barbados, Belize, Brazil, El Salvador, Guyana, Mexico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago (Venezuela absent)⁹.

On the same day of the Russian aggression – February 24– the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS) issued a statement in which it “condemns the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine and calls for an immediate cessation of the hostilities that it has irresponsibly initiated.

“Russian aggression constitutes a crime against international peace. The armed attack perpetrated against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine is reprehensible and constitutes a very serious act in violation of international law.

“Aggression has been defined as the ‘supreme international crime’ and it undoubtedly constitutes an attack against the peace and security of humanity, as well as civilized relations between States”¹⁰.

On March 25, 2022, the OAS approved the Resolution “The crisis in Ukraine” (CP/RES. 1192) (2371/22), which demands “respect for

human rights and the immediate cessation of acts that could constitute war crimes” in Ukraine. In the recitals of the Resolution, it is reiterated “that the essential rights of man are not derived from one’s being a national of a certain state, but are based upon the attributes of the human person” and it is recalled that “the Americas as a zone of Peace is based on respect for the principles and provisions of international law, including the international instruments to which the Member States are party and the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter and the Charter of the OAS”.

The text, presented by Antigua and Barbuda and Guatemala, with the co-sponsorship of the Bahamas, Colombia, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States and Uruguay, describes “...the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ukraine as deeply distressing and wholly unacceptable...” and adds that Member States undertake to “continue examining the situation in Ukraine... and to review, as necessary, the adherence of the Russian Federation to its commitment to the OAS as a Permanent Observer”.

Out of 34 active members of the OAS, 28 voted in favor, none against, and five abstained: Brazil, Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (Nicaragua absent).

Brazil, Bolivia and Honduras explained that, although they approved the text in general terms, they considered that the OAS is not the appropriate body to address the issue. Argentina and Mexico, although they did adopt the resolution, agreed on this last point¹¹.

Finally, on April 21, 2022, the OAS Permanent Council decided to suspend the status of the Russian Federation as a permanent observer to the Organization. Resolution CP/RES. 1195 (2374/22) was adopted by 25 votes in favor of the 34 active members, none against and eight abstentions: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Its text indicates that the OAS “immediately suspends” Russia until “the Russian Government ceases its hostilities, withdraws all its military forces and equipment from Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and returns to the path of dialogue and diplomacy”¹².

From the positions that the different countries adopted regarding resolutions at the international and regional levels and from their respective declarations, it can be inferred that some of them have approached the

matter, and in particular the condemnations of the Russian Federation, with greater caution. Internal political factors intervene in this, as in the case of Brazil with upcoming presidential elections and the presentation of Lula as a candidate or that of Mexico, by virtue of the ideological preferences of President López Obrador; and also economic or cooperation interests, in cases with strong dependence on Russian imports of fertilizers or cooperation in the area of defense –Brazil–. Also noteworthy is the turn of the Argentine government in the OAS, in which it first voted in favor of the resolution condemning the Russian aggression and later abstained in the vote to suspend the Russian Federation from the organization.

On the other hand, as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, expressions of concern or interest have begun to be detected on the part of the powers that have traditionally had greater influence in the region –the United States– and of those who want to dispute, to some extent, that leadership or demonstrate that they can act in their area of influence –Russia–.

Already in the first weeks of the war, the Biden Administration initiated a rapprochement with the Maduro government in Venezuela, one of the most ideologically, economically and militarily committed to the Russian Federation.

In turn, the Russian Vice Minister of Defense recently visited Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela and in the case of the last two, signed cooperation agreements on defense matters. In early February of this year, the Nicaraguan government announced that it had engaged negotiations with the Russian state nuclear energy corporation Rosatom, aimed at cooperation in the areas of energy and nuclear medicine.

Days before the invasion, the Colombian government, recently designated a NATO strategic ally, expressed its concern to the Russian government about military assistance to Venezuela and the carrying out of joint military exercises, requiring Moscow to guarantee that this will not endanger Colombia's national security. A few weeks later, Colombia and the United States carried out joint naval exercises with the purpose, according to statements by the Colombian Minister of Defense, of fighting against submarines involved in drug-trafficking and "protecting national sovereignty", within the framework of NATO.

However, these latest specific actions or the traditional cooperation between Russia and Cuba and the more recent Russian approach to Venezuela and Nicaragua, do not seem

sufficient to predict a consistent definition by these Latin American countries to integrate the so-called “sphere of influence” of the Russian Federation. The present international configuration shows a scenario that favors the decline of unipolarity and even of bipolarity shared by the United States and the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in a growing trend towards the presence of various leading actors on the world scene (notably China, India, the European Union, Turkey, in addition to the United States and the Russian Federation). This “multipolarity” and the consequent multiplication of centers of geopolitical and economic influence, favor at the same time the dispersion of interests and possibilities of choice of the states, particularly of the less developed countries, between different alternatives or poles of attraction.

The Russian Federation will probably continue to seek to intensify political relations and maintain cooperation projects with some Latin American and Caribbean countries, in order to demonstrate that it can act in the traditional sphere of influence of the United States, counteracting in some way the leading participation of the latter in NATO and in support of Ukraine. However, the economic situation of the Russian Federation –which will

be probably deteriorated by the effect of the large number and scope of the sanctions to which it is subjected in retaliation for its aggression against Ukraine and for the international isolation in which it finds itself– could limit its investment or cooperation efforts with countries that are not its allies or belong to its closest area of influence, nor are strategic from the economic and defense points of view.

Currently Russian investments and economic exchange with the region are not particularly relevant and have substantially declined since the 1990’s, when there was a peak of Russian participation in the Latin American subcontinent.

Conclusions

In short, it can be assumed that the war in Ukraine, which violates the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations and endangers international peace and security, will not have widespread effects in a region distant from the center of the conflict.

A region in which, in addition to the economic and geopolitical factors that relate it to the main actors in the conflict, its many actors are not likely to adopt unified positions

-unlike the European Union- by virtue of their particular economic interests and of the different political orientations of their governments, which promote the current polarization between the countries that comprise it.

Latin America, a traditional land of peace and a host to migrants from Europe and from other regions of the world, has housed and houses generations of Ukrainians (and Russians), who today constitute an integral part of their citizenship. In their honor, and in honor of the unwavering strength and dignity of the Ukrainian people, the governments of the region should do their utmost to contribute to the prompt end of the conflict and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

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