

THE COMPETITIVE-COOPERATIVE TRIANGLES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION OF POWER FROM THE CASE STUDY OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL POLITICAL FORCES IN SOUTH AMERICA

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Introduction

South America is intertwined with the interests of accumulating power and wealth in the two largest centers of power in the world: the United States and China. They carry out a dispute for the monopoly control of their markets and of the sources of strategic natural resources, incorporating the region in a gravitational center of the functioning and expansion of the system. Thus, economic and political pressures are growing, both internally and externally, allowing for a South American revaluation and Chinese-American expansion.

In the 21st century, power projects in South America constitute an arena of disputes that comprise a dialectical correlation between Internal and External Political Forces. In this sense, this article aims to conduct an innovative debate based on the theoretical formulation called Competitive-Cooperative Triangles of Power, taking the South American region as a case study. From a realist view of international relations and using an empirical-deduc-

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tive methodology, the objective is to achieve an epistemological construction regarding power in the international system, explaining the challenges and possibilities of the South American Internal Political Forces.

The article is organized into two sections, in addition to this introduction and the final considerations: in the first, an elucidation of the theoretical formulation of the Internal Political Forces and the External Political Forces will be carried out, and how they interact reciprocally in the South American geopolitical and geoeconomic context. The second section is divided into three parts: first, brief comments on power in international relations will be defined; subsequently, the central objective of the conceptual definition of competitive-cooperative triangles will be presented; in the last part, a demonstration of empirical cases of this new epistemological formulation in South America is proposed.

Power projects for South America - Internal Political Forces (IPF) and External Political Forces (EPF)

The Internal Political Forces (IPF): exogenist privatism, seasonal hybridism and popular nationalism

First, it is of fundamental importance to conceptually define Internal Political Forces (IPF). According to Rodrigues (2020a, 121, our translation), they are defined as “groups that aim at power, dominance or influence from the establishment of centripetal forces, impelling agents to approach the center around which they move”. In other words, IPF are capable of producing or accelerating political movements, determining the displacement of agents through a consensus that gives rise to specific social and political action, according to its principles. Therefore, they are powers fractured by dissent, whose endogenous capacity to influence the power blocks is exercised among the actors that make up the system, given that one of the main characteristics of the contemporary world is the war between capital blocks.

Fiori accurately summarizes the central point for the analysis of Internal Political Forces:

In all cases of economic success, the existence of a united and cohesive strategic nucleus within the state itself is also identified, which was largely responsible for defining and sustaining strategic objectives that remain constant for a long time, despite possible changes in government or political regime. These nuclei, or centers of power, always demonstrate - in all cases

studied - great flexibility and great capacity in the configuration of the power system in which they are inserted (Fiori 2014, 40, our translation).

First, it is important to emphasize that the IPF models, which will be presented later, cannot be considered hermetic and unmoved by internal contradictions. They constitute the search for the delimitation of an object of research based on empirical and historical observation, a concept that aims to highlight a representative project of certain social sectors, built under an interpretation of concrete reality. In addition, they conform to medium-long term trends and, therefore, are subject to a more lasting and reliable analysis.

Second, it is necessary to clarify that the Internal Political Forces are present in all countries of the world system, given the impossibility of the existence of harmony of power vis-à-vis power disputes. However, it is noteworthy that the conception of these IPF consists of a specific empirical and materialistic observation, related to the study of South America in the 21st century. These forces define a power geometry determined in a spatial and historical way, which does not, in particular, make it impossible to verify these Internal Political Forces in other regions of the world, or other conceptions in different historical periods.

A third point is the acknowledgement that the constitution of these models named Internal Political Forces constitutes an abstraction from the concrete reality and, as a subjective and particular construction of the author, it has a high degree of generalization and, with this, a high probability of criticism. In other words, when conforming IPF typologies, the aim is to study the characteristic features of a set that seeks to determine types and/or systems of power, typographic characters in a systematic way based on geopolitics, development and integration.

Finally, the difficulty of building class coalitions in South America is confirmed, mainly due to profound social inequality, divergence of interests and historical formation of power blocs. Therefore, the conformation of the terminology of Internal Political Forces was given opportunity, since, when working with this concept, principles and guidelines can be concatenated, which, at first, constitute a “political, economic and social orchestra with elements of varied fields” (Vadell; Carvalho 2014, 103, our translation). The contradiction that may occur within the IPF is nothing more than the existing contradiction within the States, whose institutional structure is an arena of interests’ struggle.

In this way, it can be seen that South America is at a crossroads due to the crises and contradictions of socio-political models and, “subsequently, whether neoliberalism was in force or not as a hegemonic ideological body af-

ter the 2001 crisis in the region” (Vadell; Carvalho 2014, 76, our translation):

It emerges from a crisis in its balance of payments from 1999 to 2009, amortized by reversing the deterioration of the terms of the trade, and from 2010, it entered a cyclical period of expansion of foreign capital inflows, where the axis of world economic growth moves from central countries to East Asia, in particular China, and peripheral countries. This situation opens a window of opportunity and a new perspective for the region (Martins 2011, 273-274, our translation).

From this window of opportunity, it is essential to understand the Internal Political Forces from a geopolitical, developmental and integrationist basis, and their correlation of power with the External Political Forces. Each insertion model proposes relations between the different fractions of class and the State in a given project, which can be determined, in the South American case, in three conceptions: exogenist privatism, seasonal hybridism and popular nationalism.

Exogenist Privatism

Exogenist privatism is a political aspect and a social and economic ideology that tends to value private initiative, private property and privatizations, mainly with the sale and management of national assets to external sectors. It is guided and conducted directly by the international private business sectors, whose “national entrepreneur should associate with the international or compete with him obligatorily” (Traspadini 2014, 40-41, our translation).

Therefore, it is a privatism of exogenous origin/influence, which develops from themes established outside the national spaces of South American countries, and whose national economies are totally guided by globalization and the interests of the great centers of power that come from the outside. Basically, it is based on three pillars: the scarcity of goods and resources must be managed by private transnational institutions; international capital is the social instrument that facilitates and moves the system; and any institution that inhibits the globalized rational market must be limited (Vadell; Carvalho 2014, 82).

Thus, there is not only a prerogative of selling state assets and favoring the cosmopolitan market, but a priority, implicit or explicit, of strengthening private activities managed by sectors outside the South American countries, whose effectiveness and efficiency may or may not take into account the real needs of national economies. “The theorists of this idea have taken on a prag-

matic claim to capitalism. Presenting globalization as an inexorable path that required greater openness, efficiency and competitiveness” (Katz 2016, 99, our translation). In other words, it is not only privatism that is encapsulated in an internal organic transformation with changes in political relations, in the productive and social organization under the liberal order, but the unrestricted denationalization at the expense of a globalized market with a predominance of international and transnational capitals.

The influence of a liberal trend can be seen in the lines that correspond to the basic nucleus of exogenist privatism. Within the set of Internal Political Forces, exogenist privatism includes groups that converge with each other, establishing blocks of power that pass through each other, influencing each other reciprocally, but are based on the valorisation of exogenous private initiative.

Seasonal Hybridism

Seasonal hybridism is characteristic of the Internal Political Force that comes from different political and economic natures, having two or more sides that manifest themselves in a determined period and conjuncture, in addition to performing isochronous movements in contradiction both in terms of their own segmentation, and in relation to other forces. It is the crossing of several flows of power that are seasonally interrelated, occurring at a specific time and that, subsequently, engenders a new configuration of partially or totally different currents. The proximity (hybridism) between the State and financial capital is an example, whose dialectical relationship presents a movement sometimes contrary to the principle of the self-regulated market, with different levels of state intervention, but which does not abandon all the measures proposed by liberal orthodoxy nor the links of States to the international capitalist system.

Seasonal hybridism favors a pragmatic adaptation to the demands of the conjuncture, and therefore incorporates formulas that contain multiple elements, without defining a clear primacy; in one moment, they advocate social progressivism, in another, a liberal progression, “they tend to call for strengthening the market and the state, reinforcing centralization and decentralization, promoting the public and private, and developing austere and active policies” (Katz 2016, 143, our translation). In South America, it is a modality of projects periodically adopted by elites, the high bureaucracies and/or the capitalist groups of these countries, whose defense tunes in to the damaging consequences of certain models, but accepts the criteria of capitalist eternity as the only possible mode of production. Therefore, “at the conclusion

of a failed experience, social amnesia emerges that makes some forget that failure, but at the same time the conditions are prepared to repeat the experiment” (Ouriques apud Katz 2016, 177, our translation).

However, a variable of the Internal Political Force that was called seasonal hybridity remains constant: the struggle between fractions of capital, but which, in a sense, converge the proposals to incorporate greater state regulation into neoliberal capitalism, in order to stabilize its functioning; in other words, a harmonious relationship between capital and social. In other words, there is a wide range of possibilities in the IPF called seasonal hybridity, justified by the fact that it incorporates different ideologies, theories and political practices, constituting itself as the most heterogeneous IPF. Therefore, seasonal hybridity is the IPF that most often has changes in its political, economic and ideological directions, since it adds a multiplicity of correspondences presented in this study. Because of this, the power blocks compete and cooperate with each other within the state’s institutional framework, based on the various flows of power that are seasonally interrelated in the struggle between the different fractions of capital.

Popular Nationalism

Popular nationalism is considered an ideology or idealism that exalts and prioritizes the national state as a political body for the management and safeguarding of national interests, leading citizens to resume some of the traditions and founding principles of their South American countries that arouse sympathy and popular affection. This IPF is considered to be the antonym of globalist cosmopolitanism, since the latter generates the loss of the concept of nation and separates the social concerns of the population from substantive decisions. We emphasize the prioritization of the popular term over the populist; however, both have a converging character when related to the definition of Laclau (2013), that the construction of populism would be a process of democratic demand in a historic moment of popular rupture.

It is essential to emphasize that there are numerous contradictory manifestations of national revival, such as xenophobia, elitist projects of national accumulation, sub-imperialist policies of oppression, among others. In this way, it is worth emphasizing that the expression highlighted is that of popular resistance at the nationalist level, which is constituted as a model guided by a political will that expresses the power of popular social forces, linked to the state power system, and that they share with it conducting the development process of the productive forces.

However, the realization of popular nationalism requires the creation

of sustainable bases for the expansion of the economic, social, political and cultural empowerment of its peoples, with the necessary condition of “facing its structural problems of internal exclusion (poverty and misery in various forms) and external (periphery)” (Martins 2011, 273-274).

Anyway, if we really want to build a national-popular project [...] the decisive intellectual task is to overcome the “mental blackout” that so many limitations imposed on the university and political environment [...]. In this context, we may or may not share skepticism about theoretical shortcomings in programs designed to overcome dependency and underdevelopment, but we have no right to forget and even less to change the terms of the debate of past decades (Ouriques 2014, 198, our translation).

This configuration is the most complex and misunderstood at the regional level, since the experiences of popular nationalism in South America are routinely sabotaged, undermined and prevented, both by contrary IPF, and by EPF who see in this current the impossibility of disseminating their experiences, practices and ideals. Therefore, popular nationalism appears as the most homogeneous of the IPF, since it proposes to be the anti-system, a current contrary to the prevailing precepts and, therefore, it needs more cohesive and convergent spheres of domination. Still, all of these blocks are aligned to the prioritization of the management of the national state through the popular route, to a lesser or greater degree.

These three typifications presented consist of distinct geoeconomic projects in South America, verified from an empirical analysis of the main power groups present in the region in the period between 2001-2020. Obviously, such systematization is susceptible to modifications, since there is a transformative and constant mutability of reality, which influences the endogenous political power blocks in this complex and dynamic power geometry.

From independence to the General Peace Agreement (1975 - 1992)

In the same way that a brief theoretical systematization about IPF in South America was carried out, the External Political Forces (EPF) are defined as:

exogenous forces that seek to establish and exercise power, control and intervention through centrifugal forces, preventing agents from moving away from the gravitational orbit of their irradiation center. Unlike the Internal Political Forces, the External Political Forces need an external agent

to exercise power, acting from outside to inside the system, that is, it is a type of force exerted on this system. Routinely, the EPF form commitments with certain IPF, which start to take decisions established and referenced to the first ones; i.e., the External Political Forces always aim to influence the Internal Political Forces that best reproduce their internal system of accumulation of power and wealth (Rodrigues 2020a, 122, our translation).

Once again, Fiori (2014, 30) clarifies the issue by stating that

these great powers collectively protect themselves, preventing the emergence of new leading states and economies, by the monopolization of arms, currency and finance, information and technological innovation. For this reason, the emergence of an emerging power is always a factor of destabilization and change in the world system, because its rise threatens the monopoly of established powers (Fiori 2014, 30, our translation).

The study of External Political Forces in South America will focus on the main external agents in the region in the 21st century, the United States and China, who intensify a kaleidoscope of power projections that directly influence the correlation of IPF.

With regard to the performance of the EPF of the United States in South America, an unprecedented scenario is presented: the relative disengagement of the United States in the face of its immediate strategic environment through a power vacuum originated by the attacks of September 11, since there was a redirecting of economic and military efforts to the Middle East and fighting the War on Terror.

Associated at first with the unilateral attitudes of George W. Bush, the attacks had a broader context: the contestation of hegemonic domination, whose military supremacy could not be fought, but whose society had fissures. To explore these fissures, the focus of 9/11 was on symbols of the country's social and economic power (the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York) and strategic-political (Pentagon and public buildings in Washington, DC) (Pecequillo 2012, 20, our translation).

This event provided two facts that would substantially characterize American policy in the Bush administration (2001-2009) and in the beginning of the 21st century: the systematization of the Patriot Act and the intensification of the Project for the New American Century. Both emerge as a result of the 2001 attacks and influence, directly or indirectly, the domestic and foreign policy of the United States, enabling a reinterpretation of their

role in the international system.

Aligned to this factor, since its election, the Bush administration indicated a significant rhetoric of unilateralism (Pecequillo 2012, 19-20), a fact that, in line with the attacks of September 11 and the window of opportunity for greater assertiveness in the military international plan justified by the fight against terrorism, enabled the activation of a project that appeared in neoconservative think tanks of the Republican Party in the 1990s, exerting a strong influence in the military sector and in the foreign policy of the president. The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) consisted of implementing a full spectrum dominance of the United States, consolidating and expanding its hegemony in the international system as the only superpower,

and, although it sometimes hesitated, kept the United States in a perpetual wartime footing, a forever war, war on terror, formalized in 2001, with Congressional authorization, to fight an invisible, unidentified, nameless and parameterless enemy, its continuity and escalating, unconstitutionally, the extrajudicial attacks and murders of terrorists or alleged terrorists, using the targeted killing tactic (Bandeira 2016, 93-94, our translation).

Despite these factors, the central criterion in the international action of the Bush administration has placed South America outside Washington's radar (Colombo; Frechero 2012, 190-191), which, in Kelly's (1997, 190, our translation) view, "political vacuum in Latin America pose potential threats to the United States". In line with this view, this vacuum of relative power enabled the rise of different actors in the region during this period, both internally and externally. Soon,

the absence of positive policies in the region after the 1990s offensive, the difficulty in accommodating emerging bilateral partners, the economic crisis and the paralysis of an increasingly polarized political and social system in Washington are indicators of the weakening of presence in the hemisphere. And, even more, a loss of spaces that extends to different geopolitical scenarios and to the processes of global deconcentration of power (Pecequillo 2012, 54-55, our translation).

The last years of the Bush administration were marked by the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis, a paradigmatic tipping point within the United States and throughout the international system. This event encouraged the rhetoric of the hegemonic refoundation of the United States with the election of Barack Obama (2009-2017), modifying the American foreign policy and, concomitantly, its relationship with South America (Pecequillo 2012, 25).

Thus, although the attempt at global governance based on the full spectrum domain of the United States has continued and even intensified, there is a return of geostrategic direction to its immediate surroundings, through different actions in the economic field and, more sharply, in the military.

The Obama administration's action basically consisted of an attempt to petrify the world order and implement totalitarian domination of the United States, corroborating with its predecessor, since it sought "full-spectrum dominance, ardently sought after the decomposition of the Soviet Union" (Bandeira 2016, 145, our translation). This full spectrum domination aims to conquer strategic positions and to condition wars in search of markets and/or access to natural resources, even if it includes direct interference in other countries through regime change operations. In addition, such global governance is directly related to the project The New American Century, adapting it to the new imperatives of the international system and adapting it to the new types of war.

It should be noted that the year 2008, identified here as a mark of American recovery, coincides with the outbreak of the global economic crisis in developed countries, further reinforcing the concept that the United States' EPF in South America gains strength as an outlet for its economic tensions. That is, they do not emerge from a constructive policy for the continent or that aimed at deepening collaboration, but rather from a need to preserve the zone of hemispheric influence and contain the advance of new poles of power in this region and on a global scale (Pecequillo 2013, 112).

The revaluation of South American countries on the global geopolitical board, such as Brazil and Venezuela, and regions such as the South Atlantic, has a relationship directly proportional to the adjustment of US EPF in the face of new regional and global phenomena. In other words, the greater the margin of autonomy of these and other states, the greater the chances of clashing interests with hegemony.

Faced with this scenario, North American reactions to the expansion of emerging markets in South America (and also in Africa and the South Atlantic). Began in a more systematic way in 2008, reaching greater intensity from 2009, with the arrival of Barack Obama to power in the White House. Obama not only continued the policies launched by George W. Bush in the geopolitical field, he also included geoeconomic components in the containment agenda of Brazil and China. Stallings (2008) points out that even though the Brazilian and Chinese stance is not confrontational in the face of hegemony, the fact that their projection of power started to clash with the North American one in the economic and in the political-strategic dimension imposed a need for a response by the United States (Pecequillo

2013, 112, our translation).

Therefore, the action of the United States consists of preventing the emergence of a possible power, as well as preventing any hostile power from dominating or exercising any type of influence, a “regional stability goal, which seeks to prevent threats to the vital interests of the United States in the face of ‘destabilizing countries’ in the region” (Bruckmann 2011, 207, our translation). To this end, they maintain mechanisms to dissuade potential competitors from aspiring to a regional or global role, intervening politically, militarily and economically. Specifically for South America, the objectives of the US hemispheric strategy are to maintain its supremacy and military presence, reducing the military forces in the countries of the region; spread the broad economic liberalization agenda, through bilateral or regional agreements; dominance over the hemisphere’s resources and markets; oppose the Chinese expansion and the rise of Brazil in the region, undermining its projects (MERCOSUR, UNASUR and BRICS).

The increase in Brazilian prestige and energy issues (the pre-salt reserves in Brazil and in the South Atlantic) lead to the reactivation of the Fourth Fleet of the South Atlantic, the continuity of Plan Colombia and the pressure on the Triple Border, considered a zone of terrorist risk. The reactivation of the Fourth Fleet responds to the Chinese and Indian advances in Latin America, and to the increase in military cooperation between Venezuela and Russia (and the approach of Venezuela to Iran). Further on, the constitution of the UNASUR Security Council (CSD) becomes a source of concern for the Americans (Pecequillo 2012, 53-54, our translation).

As stated by Fiori (2007; 2014), the projection of power of any and all hegemonic countries in the international system, historically, encompasses a synchronic dichotomy between the power of weapons and currencies, that is, military power and economic power. With regard to the United States’ External Political Forces in post-Cold War South America, this duality can be seen explicitly in terms of economic power, exemplified in the FTAA and other Free Trade Agreements (FTA’s) as the TPP, TTIP and TISA, and implicit in military power, via the realization of the so-called hybrid war (Korybko 2018; Rodrigues 2020b).

On the other side of the international balance of power, South America is considered a geostrategic region for China at the beginning of the 21st century. As Tsai and Liu (2012) point out, since initiatives such as the visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, in 2001 in Chile, and Presi-

dent Hu Jintao's two visits to the continent, in 2004² and 2008, China has been proclaiming the South-South cooperation and preparing the ground for strengthening interregional exchanges: "in just over a decade, China migrates from almost absence to the main position in economic relations with LAC" (Vadell and Neves 2018, 208, our translation). In other words, these facts placed South America as one of the fundamental geopolitical spaces for the Chinese External Political Forces.

Still in 1999, the Chinese government launched a strategy, together with the Chinese Council for the Promotion of International Trade (China Council for the Promotion of International Trade - CCPIT), called "going out" or "going global" (Shambaugh 2013, 174). In general, it has consisted of a foreign investment policy, encouraged and carried out by the state, aimed at expanding and intensifying the internationalization process of Chinese companies (Economy; Levi 2014, 49), making them competitive to operationalize and reach global markets. Thus, the key part of the Going Out strategy consists of "financial support by the CDB and the China Export-Import Bank (CHEXIM), at least when it comes to the activities of large state-owned and state supported firms that make up the bulk of China's overseas foreign direct investment (FDI)" (Gallagher 2016, 51).

In 2001, this policy was incorporated into the 10th Five-Year Plan (2000-2005), based on five objectives: to increase Chinese investments abroad; diversification of production; rationalization of administrative processes (with an increase in the level and quality of projects); improvement of financial channels for the national market; and promotion of Chinese brands in international markets, mainly American and European (Leite and Ramos 2016, 169-170).

By the early 1990s, there was a conscious government policy launched to encourage Chinese commercial firms to "go out" and for Chinese localities and organizations to more generally "go global". The encouragement to Chinese companies did not really begin to materialize until around 2007, but by the mid-2000s considerable international initiatives were being launched by a wide variety of Chinese organizations, localities, and individuals (Shambaugh 2013, 5).

Another determining feature is that this trajectory of reforms, coupled

2 "In 2004, according to Johnson and Wasson, the Chinese President Hu Jintao announced an investment plan for the region and the interest in increasing the country's trade with Latin America. At that time, attention was already focused on the Southern part of the continent- Brazil, Chile and Argentina- later expanding even more" (Pecequillo 2013, 109).

with the increase in value chains and the growing technological update, finally allows China to be admitted to the WTO at the end of 2001, after years of intense negotiations, having to adapt to some rules of the private market with an unprecedented commercial opening, although with strong control over the exchange rate (Vadell 2011, 99). In return, it would benefit from ample access to Western markets (Sevares 2015, 27). Therefore, such an event caused a huge jump in the volume of Chinese foreign trade, extending its integration to globalization and contributing decisively to an expansive cycle of the world economy that would last until 2008.

Likewise, Sino-South American economic relations have been intensifying since 2001. As previously stated, both the entry into the WTO and the State visits in 2004 and 2005 gave rise to the signing of trade, investment and cooperation agreements in different areas (Vadell, Ramos, Neves 2016, 81; Leite and Ramos 2016, 172-173). In addition, the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010) established an imperative to increase aid to other developing countries, including as a way of collaborating with the going global strategy: "In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that Chinese cooperation is governed by the rule of mutual benefit and shared gain towards aid recipients" (Brutto 2018, 115, our translation).

With the tipping point brought about by the 2008 financial crisis, both China's domestic and foreign policy have undergone considerable changes, triggering a new stage after the long cycle of beneficial globalization since the 1970s. In a sense, such mutations are perceived as an opportunity for the Chinese domestic economy, since the vulnerability of international disturbances alerted the Chinese State to the need to build a more robust domestic consumer market (Niu 2013, 203), in addition to providing vigorous counter-cyclical fiscal policy, sustaining the level of economic activity (Naughton 2015) based mainly on the intensive use of labor, as the country approaches the status of "middle income" (Jaguaribe 2011, Perkins 2013).

Between 2008 and 2016, China has been undergoing substantial changes, with lower rates of economic expansion added to policies and guidelines that aim at more "sustainable" growth. This explains, in a sense, the lower Chinese rhythm, with a new paradigm called "New Normal" (Naughton 2017, 21; Perkins 2013; Pereira and Ribeiro 2016), where exports and the foreign market lose relative centrality in the guidelines of the government in the face of expanding consumption and domestic demand. Such targeting for the domestic market, present even in the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), helps to understand the drastic cooling of commodity prices (Naughton 2015), generating consequences for the global and regional dynamics by closing a benign exogenous cycle for South American terms of trade (Pereira and Ribeiro

2016).

Therefore, when going through the stages of regionalization and globalization, China also systematically developed deeper trade, investment and diplomatic relations with South America in the period from 2001 to 2020, showing a growing political and economic interdependence between these countries in relation to China, called hybrid geoeconomics, considering that it consists of:

use of economic instruments based on a multiform and asymmetric duality that, when used in certain countries or regions, present both advantages and disadvantages. It is a process of economic activity with geopolitical purposes, carried out by the combination of elements that bring both development and dependence, progress and backwardness, bonuses and burdens, characterizing, expressing or manifesting themselves by composition of disparate, ambiguous elements and in different political-economic modalities (Rodrigues 2020a, 188).

Summing up, after the definition of both the Internal Political Forces and the External Political Forces, as well as their empirical visualization in South America in the 21st century from the empirical-deductive methodology, it is proposed to discuss the central objective of this work: the theoretical construction of Competitive-Cooperative Triangles (TCCs) of power in international relations.

Competitive-Cooperative Triangles of Power

Power in International Relations

The Internal Political Forces and the External Political Forces are configurations of power in international relations. In the specific case of the countries of South America, the United States and China, it allows the evaluation of different geostrategies in different scenarios, based on a materialist dialectic that changes over time. Consequently, the power variable is essential for the study of this set of selected countries.

There is a dialectical relationship between the state, the Internal Political Forces and the External Political Forces; both influence each other, exerting pressures that modify the countries' internal circumstances, regional arrangements and the international system itself. Thus, it is essential to study such concepts in the practical South American and world reality, since the

proposed model engenders competition, contradiction and accumulation of power and wealth, basic characteristics of the capitalist interstate system and that, intuitively, directly influence the actors cited.

Consequently, determining the state as an aggregating element of power in the topics presented, it is essential to theoretically rationalize power itself. In the scope of international relations, this is one of the most intensely debated topics. Since Machiavelli (2012), when demonstrating that the accumulation of power was essential for the Prince, with the permanent preparation for war through political resilience (*virtú*) or luck (*fortune*), the different political actors aim to quantify and qualify capabilities and the possibility of exercising power. Other classics of international relations also examined the theme: according to Morgenthau (2003), power is defined as the strength of a man over the minds and actions of other men; for Aron (2002), in the most general sense, power is the capacity that a political unit has to impose its will on others; in Nye's view (2004, 2), power is "the ability to influence others to get the outcomes one wants"; according to Lukes (1980), there would be four fundamental approaches to power in political philosophy³.

Therefore, power is the ability, the force that acts on a certain reality; it is all the probability of imposing one's ambition in a social relationship against resistance, whatever the basis of that probability; it is the ability to impose your will, which results in something concrete or subjective. Thus, the power for action is studied, for creation, construction or destruction; when power is oriented towards an objective, it is used to modify the structure, the existing relationships.

Power, state and class make up the main relationship of forces within the international system. The Internal Political Forces guide the power of the state within its institutional core, and the way they extend outwards. In other words, a strong state is one that exercises its power, both externally and internally, being a partially autonomous entity that requires a social class whose direct interests are at the service of the entity, both by the administrators of the state and by the state bureaucracy. In those states where the state apparatus is weak, public administrators do not intervene in the role of coordinating power from a complex of political forces.

Still, it is important to emphasize that the state and power, in themselves, are abstractions that gain concreteness from the dispute of different so-

3 Such as: 1) substantialist, that refers to means, like exercise or dominance; 2) subjective, related to capacities, the competence of each player to exercise dominance and legitimation; relational, linked to direct dominance and the capacity to influence players in a different manner, if it was not in a position of control; and 4) structural, linked to the constraint, and control in decision making context.

cial classes. When adding the perspective of the social classes - in the present work identified as Internal Political Forces - it is ratified that the unique and exclusive perspective of the states hides the role of the classes in the strategies of power. The role of IPF is a conditioning factor in the strategies assumed by the states, as well as in the orientation of specific power strategies. In other words, the state and power correspond to an abstraction whose concreteness is realized by social classes and/or Internal Political Forces; its definitions are always concrete, conditioned to the existence of the class struggle.

In this same line of reasoning, Fiori's definition of power (2007, 16-19; 2014, 18-22) is one of the most interesting. According to the author, "power is a relationship that is constituted and defined, tautologically, by the dispute and the continuous struggle for power itself" (Fiori 2014, 18, our translation). Therefore, by definition, power is asymmetrical⁴, relative⁵, heterostatic⁶, flow⁷ and expansive⁸, in which the international system consists of a shock of wills constituted by relations between states aiming at the accumulation of power and wealth.

For the scope of the present research, the definitions of triangular power and systemic power are the most elucidating, mainly with regard to the further theoretical formulation on the so-called Competitive-Cooperative Triangle (CBT). For Fiori (2014, 19), triangular power is one in which:

every power relationship involves at least two internal vertices and an external limit that can be represented in the form of a point or an external vertex, where the intersection between P₁ and P₂ occurs, for example. In this sense, it can be said that the limit of any and all P_n power units, always

4 "If all had the same power, there would be no struggles or 'power relations'" (Fiori 2014, 18, our translation).

5 "Power involves a hierarchy and constant tug of war between one vertex that holds more power than another, and other that, for certain, will have less power. If one vertex increases its level of freedom, another will lose, inevitably in comparison to the one which expanded" (Fiori 2014, 18, our translation).

6 "Any of these power variations always generates a somewhat immediate reaction of the prejudiced parties, in order to reinstate and sustain the power correlation, pertaining to the previous situation and initial change" (Fiori 2014, 18, our translation).

7 "Power is an action in movement and it only exists when it is exercised in a continuum. There is no way to conceive an immutable power, or to conceive logically the possibility of an inactive or neutral power" (Fiori 2007, 17, our translation).

8 "Each unity of power (P₁, P₂, P₃ etc), exercises a competitive pressure on itself, and all of these units exercise the same pressure one in relation to another. As a consequence, the system, as a whole, also expands in a continuous manner. (Fiori 2014, 19). Still, "therefore, in this type of system, all sovereign powers are and will always be expansionists, proposing itself, in the last instance, to conquer an even greater global power" (Fiori 2007, 18, our translation).

established by another P_{n-1} power unit, will have the same characteristics as P_n , and therefore will also have its limit drawn by one more unit of power P_{n-2} , and so on infinitely, with respect to P_{n-3} , P_{n-4} etc. (Fiori 2014, 19, our translation).

In other words, the power relationship has always at least one and any boundary, since the power of P_1 exerts influence to the point where the power of P_2 begins, a space in which it is not possible to obtain effectiveness. Furthermore, any cut that is made of power consists of a triangle, since each and every link has a relationship between more than two actors, characterizing, therefore, power with innumerable borders and power relations between innumerable triangles. Thus, “all human relations involve a ‘triangular structure’, minimal and irreducible, and at the same time asymmetric and hierarchical” (Fiori 2016, 15, our translation).

Still, with regard to systemic power, Fiori ratifies the impossibility of “thinking about a unit of power without logically assuming the existence of a set of other units of power that multiply in the form of triangles that suppose other triangles, and so on” (Fiori 2014, 19, our translation). That is, P involves a system of P ’s, which form infinite conflicting, competitive, overlapping triangles, whose power relationship is infinitely elastic and timeless.

If power relations were binary and closed on themselves, they would become a zero-sum game and would tend to disappear in an autophagic way. This only does not happen because power is triangular and systemic, and all of its units can expand outside themselves, through the conquest of power or some portion of power from the other units of the system (Fiori 2014, 19, our translation).

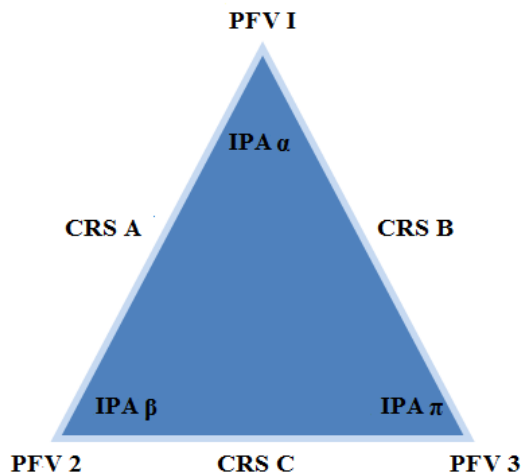
Fiori theorizes a phenomenology of power that instigates his study within the framework of international relations, focusing on how his logic behaves in the interstate system. It is interesting to note that it is configured as an unprecedented and complex line of reasoning and that, although abstract, allows for multiple interpretations in an attempt to analyze concrete reality.

Conceptual definition of Competitive-Cooperative Triangles of Power in International Relations

Based on what was exposed about the Internal Political Forces in South America (e.g: exogenist privatism, seasonal hybridity and popular nationalism), the global External Political Forces (e.g: the United States and Chi-

na) and the theorizing about the triangular and systemic power, it is possible to define Competitive-Cooperative Triangles. They are geometric structures of power formed by three vertices of Political Forces, three sides of competitive or cooperative relations and three internal political angles, whose dispute to equal, overcome or gain geopolitical and geoeconomic benefits presents an asymmetric, hierarchical and, obviously, competitive or cooperative triangulation.

Figure 1: Competitive-Cooperative Triangle



Subtitles:		
Political Force Vertex (PFV 1)	Political Force Vertex (PFV 2)	Political Force Vertex (PFV 3)
Competitive-Cooperative Relationship Side (CRS A)	Competitive-Cooperative Relationship Side (CRS B)	Competitive-Cooperative Relationship Side (CRS C)
Internal Political Angle (IPA a)	Internal Political Angle (IPA b)	Internal Political Angle (IPAr)

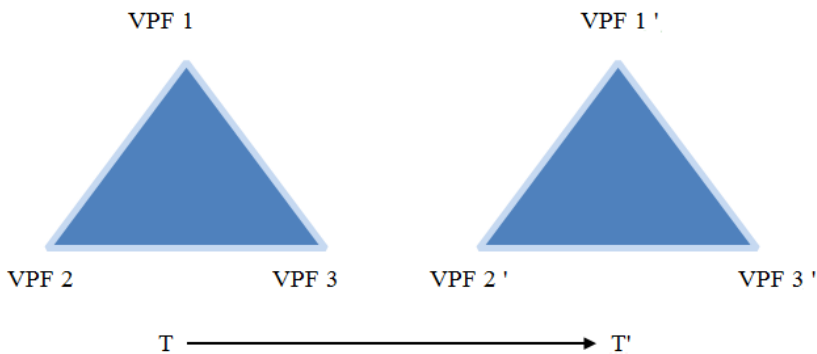
Source: Author's elaboration.

In the table above, the Competitive-Cooperative Triangle presents a structure in which the representation of the Political Force Vertex (PFV 1) establishes a Competitive-Cooperative Relationship Side (CRS A) with the Political Force Vertex (PFV 2), which constitutes a Competitive-Cooperative Relationship Side (CRS C) with the Political Force Vertex (PFV 3), ending the

triangulation by the Competitive-Cooperative Relationship Side (CRS B) with the Political Force Vertex (A). Likewise, each Vertex has an Internal Political Angle (VPF 1-IPA a ; VPF 2-IPA b ; VFP 3-IPA r), representing the internal disputes of forces of each vertex, in addition to being subject to change according to variations in the Sides of Competitive-Cooperative Relations.

It is interesting to note the justification for the design of CCTs. A priori, the correlation between competition and cooperation in the same theoretical conception may seem a logical incongruity. Such a fact is not only possible, but also rational, when considering two factors: the first, in the international system, there is no power vacuum and, since power is flow, action and movement, exercised continuously, there is no possibility of idealizing a static, disabled or neutral power. In other words, if there is any space for the exercise of power in any of its forms, it will be readily occupied by some power. The second factor is that the triangular power is about three-point chains, in which the relationship, competitive or cooperative, between two vertices (VFP 1 and VFP 2) forms one side (LRC A), but reflects and influences, directly or indirectly, in competitive or cooperative terms, in the relation of the other vertices as a whole (VFP 1 and VFP 3, with LRC B; and VFP 2 and VFP 3, with LRC C).

Figure 2: Competitive-Cooperative Triangle – Effects and Reflexes

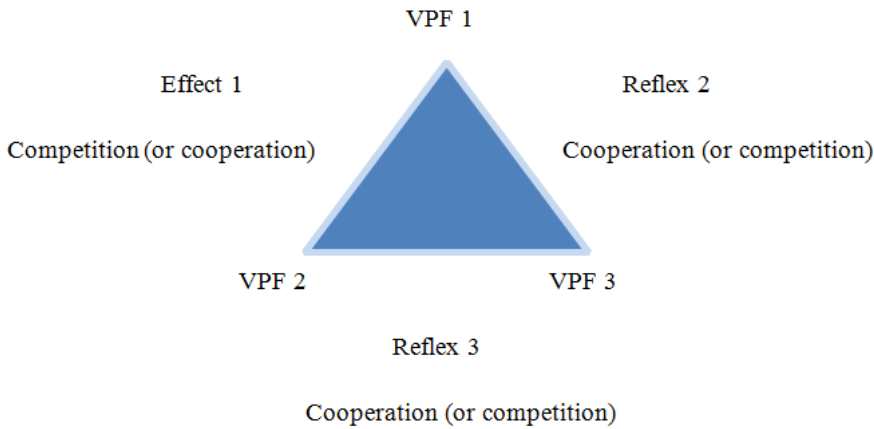


Source: Author's elaboration.

Another abstraction that can be performed from a CCT is related to its time frame. In other words, since the nature of the international system, like that of states themselves, is a constant flow of competitions, cooperation and transformations, an intertemporal triangular relationship changes over time, whether in the correlation of forces between the Political Forces, in Com-

petitive-Cooperative Relations between them and in their Internal Political Angles, as shown in figure 3.

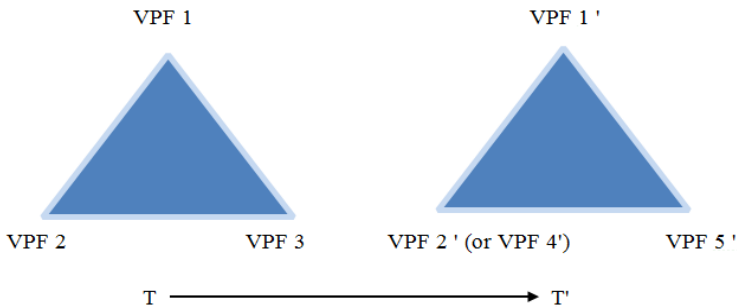
Figure 3: Competitive-Cooperative Triangle – Intertemporal Relationship



Source: Author’s elaboration.

This is an interesting analysis tool if one is looking to perform comparative analysis of Competitive-Cooperative Triangles over a given period. In addition, there is not only the finding of links between the same actors in different periods of time, but, simultaneously, one or two different actors within this intertemporality, as shown in figure 4.

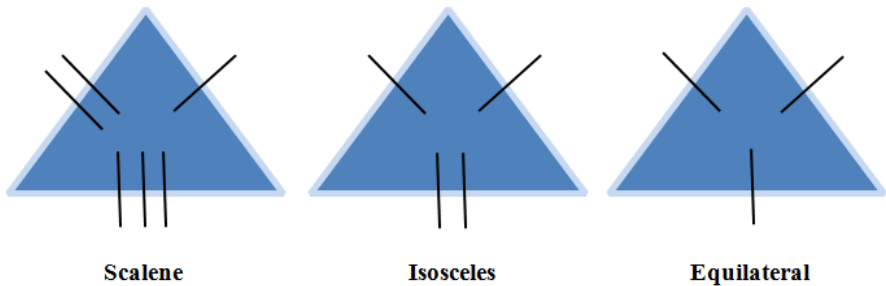
Figure 4: Competitive-Cooperative Triangle – Intertemporal Relationship with Distinct Actors



Source: Author’s elaboration.

By mathematical definition, triangles are classified based on their side measurements. Similarly, by transplanting this identity to the plane of international relations and, when considering each side of the triangle as a competitive or cooperative relationship between specific political forces (internal or external), the asymmetries of power therefore mean different sides of the triangles. That is, each vertex, at a given historical, spatial and relational moment, from the geopolitical, developmental and integrationist perspectives, has greater, lesser or analogous strength when compared to the other vertex(s), and so on.

Figure 5: Competitive-Cooperative Triangle – Power Math



Source: Author's elaboration.

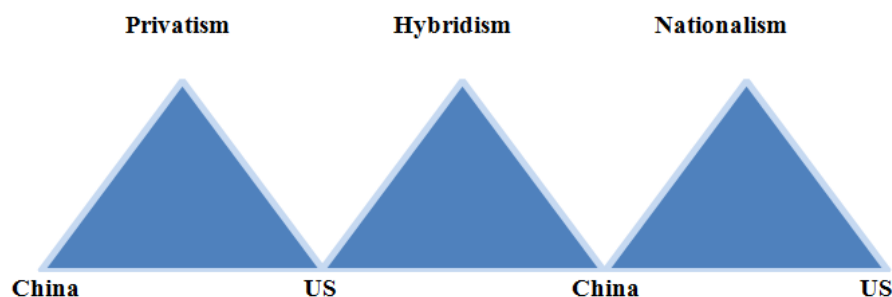
Therefore, a classification can be made based on these asymmetries: 1) scalene competitive-cooperative triangle is one that has all different sides, that is, the asymmetry of power is distinct in the three vertices and in the three internal political angles; 2) isosceles competitive-cooperative triangle is one that has two equal sides and, therefore, two vertices and two internal political angles have equivalent power; 3) equilateral competitive-cooperative triangle is one that has all equal sides, with internal political angles, therefore presenting axes of symmetry of power.

The Empirics of Competitive-Cooperative Triangles in South America

In order to clarify these theoretical abstractions of power, it is possible to relate them to succinct examples of the present work presented so far. In the illustration below, the vertices of each triangle correspond to the Internal Political Forces in South America, at the top, and the global External Political

Forces, at the bottom. It is understood that each triangular relationship refers to a correlation of temporal and spatial forces, according to the material conditions present in political-economic terms, with two vertices in order to prevail the majority Political Force in the competitive or cooperative correlation, represented on the side of the triangle. In the case of the Privatist Political Force, the side of the most powerful triangle tends to prevail for the American Political Force, shifting its internal political angle to the right. Concomitantly, with the counterpart of the Nationalist Political Force, there is a tendency of convergence for China and a shift of the internal political angle to the left. For the Hybrid Political Force, both External Political Forces exert direct and indirect influence, keeping their internal political angles constant.

Figure 6: Competitive-Cooperative Triangle - Internal Political Forces in South America and Global External Political Forces

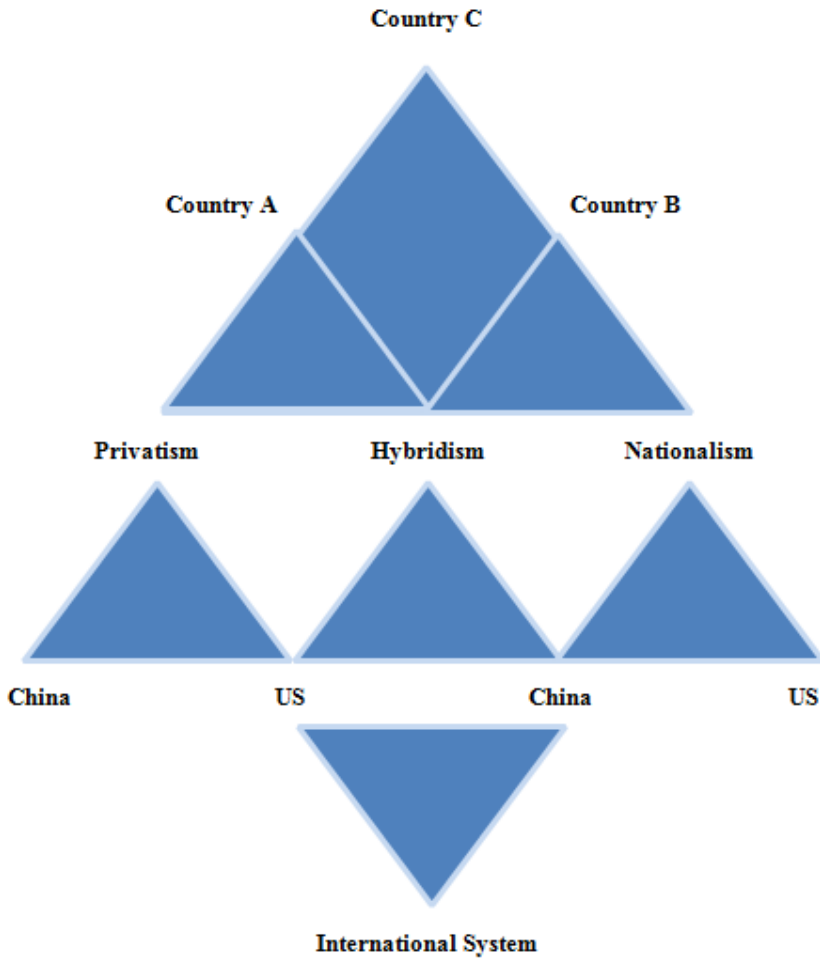


Source: Author's elaboration.

It should be noted that the correlation of forces between the External Political Forces, whether to a greater or lesser extent, also affects the linkage of the third actor, the Internal Political Force, in benefit or not. Furthermore, the Internal (and External) Political Forces compete with each other, causing new triangular, endogenous and exogenous relationships to be formed. In figure 7, it is observed that at the domestic level, there are competitive disputes between privatism and hybridism in country A, between hybridism and nationalism in country B, and between privatism and nationalism in country C, configuring endogenous competitive triangles of Internal Political Forces. Concomitantly, the dispute for the international system between the two great powers, the United States and China, shapes the competition of the External Political Forces. Since the internal and external plans of these competitive triangles have dialectical flows of influence, any change in one of the vertices

of any triangle changes the correlation of forces on the side of that same triangle, as well as the internal political angles, changing, to a lesser or greater extent, the entire system.

Figure 7: Competitive-Cooperative Triangle – Endogenous and Exogenous Relationships



Source: Author's elaboration.

Since the triangular relations are infinite, multiple forces could be added in the proposed scheme, even outside the sphere of the state. The aim here was to carry out a simplified systematization, in order to visualize the ge-

opolitical and geoeconomic implications related to the Internal and External Political Forces, as well as their competitive-cooperative triangular relations.

Figure 8: Competitive-Cooperative Triangle – Other Actors



Source: Author's elaboration.

In the international system, all countries, regardless of their role in the global hierarchical structure, seek to increase their power and wealth. Although they do not propose to increase their territories in geographic terms, they are all expansive. In this context, “the ‘competitive pressure’ of power is always a systemic pressure, because all ‘sovereign powers’ need to expand or defend themselves, even if it is simply to conserve the power they already have” (Fiori 2007, 17-18).

From the systematization carried out on the CCTs, “the increase in power, freedom and equality of one of its three ends will imply loss of sovereignty, autonomy and the difference of the other two ends” (Fiori 2016, 15, our translation), in which the most powerful vertex will continue to be the one that founds the rules of the game, the ethical-moral criterion and the political and economic arbitration, establishing and adapting to its interests the sides of the competitive and/or cooperative relations and the internal political angles, in this incessant dispute geopolitics by global power.

It is also worth noting that this theoretical analysis of the CCTs has a directly proportional relationship with the Latin expression “*Inter duos litigantes, tertius gaudens*”: between two litigants, the third rejoices, that is, when two fight a third one takes advantage; “rather than getting in the middle of every fight, sometimes it is better to hold the coats of those who do” (Arrighi 2007, 298). At the same time, it is inversely proportional to the theory of the balance of power: instead of aiming at supporting any of the vertices of power, it explores favorable periods of mutual hostility from the strongest vertices to

the achievement of predefined objectives. In other words, it is proposed that, although an actor is the weakest point of the triangular relationship, there are loopholes in the geometry of power that give rise to political assertiveness aiming at the accumulation of power and wealth.

Analyzing the specific situation of South America in the triangular power relationship with the United States and China, the possibility of three different triangulations is perceived, from the definition of the three Internal Political Forces and the two External Political Forces. Obviously, these generalizations change even within the analyzed period (2001-2020), as well as in the relationship between the United States and China with each of the Internal Political Forces. Therefore, in order to simplify the example, a brief qualitative analysis of a triangulation (IPF, EPF 1 and EPF 2) will be carried out in the three periods of the time frame: 2001, 2008 and 2016, considered paradigmatic for both the international system and specific character of Sino-American relations with South America.

Since 2001, the attacks on the twin towers and the presence in Eurasia with the War in Afghanistan/Iraq in the context of the Global War on Terror “undermined the centrality of the US and its currency in the global political economy, and strengthened the tendency towards the emergence of China as an alternative to US leadership in East Asia and beyond” (Arrighi 2007, 209). Concomitantly with the weakening of American unipolarity, it included China’s entry into the WTO in 2001, in line with its Go Global policy, which led to greater economic and diplomatic participation on all geopolitical boards. In South America, the decline in the commercial, economic and political relevance of the United States, and the strengthening of the Chinese presence “can also be largely attributed to the strengthening of the Pink Tide⁹ and the regional integration process” (Dominguez 2016, 135-136, our translation).

This dynamic favored an American retreat/distance and an advance/strengthening of Chinese commercial relations in South America, allowing a moment of expansion of the IPF (to a lesser or greater degree depending on its characteristics) by taking advantage of the US power vacuum, benefiting “The development of autonomous proposals, in which the United States is not inserted: they are autochthonous agendas and focused on interests and the improvement of South American conditions” (Carmo and Pecequillo 2016, 58, our translation).

The 2008 financial crisis is a turning point for the three corners of

9 Pink tide is an expression utilized in foreign policy analysis in the beginning of the 21st century to conceptualize the growing influence of the left in Latin America in the end of the 1990s decade and the early 2000s, when heads of State linked to reformist parties from the left were elected.

the triangulation, whose characteristics do not neglect the previous ones, but constitute new forms of power relations. In the United States, the initial focus on economic recovery is aligned with the counter-reaction/assertive resumption in South America (Carmo and Pecequillo 2016, 71), seen in the attempts to sign the TPP and the relevance of the Pacific Alliance and other bilateral treaties; in China, there is a redirection of domestic policy (New Normal) and a slowdown in economic growth, which directly reverberates in the decrease in trade flows with South America, together with the intensification of investment flows and bilateral/multilateral treaties; for IPF in general, the substitution of high to low profile agendas is seen, intensified by the changes to liberal governments in the elections and with the growing emptying of autonomous regional leaders, causing the United States and China to resume a certain role (Carmo and Pecequillo 2016, 73).

In 2016, the general scenario underwent new transformations: the election of Donald Trump in the United States, focused on economic protectionism and military interventionism (Rodrigues 2017), provided elements of constant instability in American domestic and foreign policy; the increasingly striking presence in the figure of Xi Jinping engendered a Chinese redirection in the international system, from the intensification of the role of the BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative, and to the South American subcontinent with the second policy paper specific to the region; in South America, after a decade of advances in several political and economic aspects, there is a set of setbacks from a geostrategic point of view, in which the consequences are presented through the “loss of space and leadership, the increase of regional instability, the emptying of integration projects, the consolidation of China’s presence in South America and the deepening of the American hegemonic counter-reaction” (Carmo and Pecequillo 2016, 65-66, our translation).

In general terms, analyzing the Sides of Competitive-Cooperative Relations, the following parameters are visualized in the relationship between China - United States: in a context of “asymmetric bipolarity” (Stuenkel 2016, 83-84), there is a pattern of cooperative coexistence (Kissinger 2011, 468-469), since there is a perception that both need each other and are too big to be dominated and/or transformed; and competitive coexistence (Shambaugh 2013, 73-74), in which, despite the interconnection in different areas, there has been an increase in competition in the economic, ideological, security and geopolitical levels in recent years, which could make South America “the theater of global disputes between Monroe and Mao’s heirs” (León-Manriquez and Alvarez 2014, 24). In the United States - South America relationship, the imposition of the geopolitics of the Hybrid War can be seen, as seen in the previous sections, mainly with the resumption of the region on the American

geostrategic radar as of 2008. Regarding the relationship between China - South America, the permissiveness of Hybrid Geoeconomics is ratified, in which Beijing uses trade, investment and diplomacy with the intention of balancing regional and global dominance.

Final Remarks

This article intended to present a new epistemological formulation of power, the Competitive-Cooperative Triangles, backed by the correlations of Internal and External Political Forces in the South American case study. In this way, it is concluded that the Competitive-Cooperative Triangles established by the United States - China - South America correlation are highly complex, giving rise to new projects and academic research that aim to explore the infinite possibilities of these triangulations of power in their multiple disciplinary dimensions.

As final considerations, we reaffirm that the balance of power triangulation in South America starts to be disrupted when the subcontinent, traditionally in the sphere of influence of the US, is attracted by the Chinese magnetic pole, increasing concerns on the American side because it consists of a vital area for their regional security and stability. China has been increasing its ties with South America, using multilateral institutions to restrict and dilute American power and influence, using “multilateralism” as a means of achieving “multipolarism” (Shambaugh 2013, 153). China has also supported the advance of regional integration mechanisms, such as CELAC, seen by the United States in a hostile way, since the creation of the China - CELAC Forum intentionally excludes them. Such a geopolitical chessboard tends to become increasingly dynamic as the interests of the three vertices of power become more latent.

In so doing, Latin American leaders will not be operating in a vacuum. Latin America will have to navigate the China Triangle. At the top of the triangle tip is the United States, while China and Latin America form a new base of cooperation from left to right. But China has its own delicate relationship with the United States. The United States has a longstanding connection to the Americas. In addition to reforms at home, Latin American capitals will need to retool alliances with China to be more consistent with those reforms. At the same time, China’s new alliance with Latin America is seen as a challenge to the United States, a nation that has long considered the Americas its backyard. To be successful, then, Latin America’s reforms will have to operate in a manner that simultaneously builds on its relationships with China and the United States alike rather than picking one over the

other (Gallagher 2016, 3).

In such a way, South America is outlined as a sensibly geostrategic area in the medium term, visualizing “a revival of the region as a geopolitical and geoeconomic space” (Pecequilo 2013, 101), in which “concerns on China’s rise and increasing pressures from US hard-liners could transform Latin America in a scenario of geopolitical dispute between the two great powers” (León-Manriquez and Alvarez 2014, 23-24).

Thus, analyzing the proposed theoretical framework, some conclusions can begin to be drawn:

1) in triangular relations, both competition and cooperation provide opportunities for South American countries, by establishing benefits with the other vertex of power;

2) adding a geo-economic pattern to the geopolitical paradigm, new frontiers are opened for triangulations of power, which can benefit the region if the IFP outline objectives, goals and geostrategic plans;

3) for South America, the increase in exchanges with Beijing may increase the bargaining power with Washington, changing the historical structure from boss to partner (Gallagher 2016, 176-177), based on the perception “that China could become an alternative to asymmetric interdependence with the United States, both in strategic and economic sectors” (Pecequilo 2013, 108);

4) from the previous conclusion, it follows that this fact tends to arouse apprehensions on the part of the United States, considering the intensity acquired by Sino-South American relations as dysfunctional to their interests in the region (Sevares 2015, 101);

5) in a geostrategic vision of South American autonomy, the region could take advantage of Sino-American regional and global competition by capitalizing and strengthening pragmatic ties with both parties, aiming at its socio-economic development as a strategic goal.

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, power projects in South America constitute disputes that comprise a dialectical correlation between Internal and External Political Forces. In this sense, this article aims to conduct an innovative debate based on the theoretical formulation called Competitive-Cooperative Triangles of Power, taking the South American region as a case study. From a realist view of international relations and by using an empirical-deductive methodology, the objective is to achieve an epistemological construction regarding power in the international system, explaining the challenges and possibilities of the South American Internal Political Forces.

KEY WORDS

Competitive-Cooperative Triangles of Power; Internal and External Political Forces; South America.

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