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NERINT STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

The acceleration of pace of international events and processes requires a qualified analysis without the political-journalistic bias that often characterizes them. Thus, in addition to theoretical-analytical articles, we consider it necessary to publish a brief evaluation of important current events. To this end, the Brazilian Center for Strategy and International Relations (NERINT), member of the Center for International Studies on Government (CEGOV-UFRGS), launched the *NERINT Strategic Analysis* series, with the contribution of its specialized researchers and guests with thematic expertise.

It will be published at the end of each volume of *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy and International Relations*, starting with an assessment of Post-Trump Diplomacy, conflicts in Russia's "near abroad" and the Strategic Lessons of World War II on its 75th anniversary. Since the 1990s, Itamaraty has been promoting the formation of qualified national academic personnel on themes and countries relevant to Brazilian diplomacy, business and defense. This training effort, through the promotion and funding of graduate courses, is paying off, and Brazil already has professors and researchers at an international level.

THE BELARUS ELECTION AND ITS INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

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There is a false impression that the conflict that broke out after this year's presidential elections in Belarus is once again explained by the simplistic dichotomy between Russia and the West. Even more simplistic is the interpretation that the Russians are supporting Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, who from the beginning would be seen as an opponent by the countries of the European Union and NATO. Since the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, Lukashenko has been moving away from Russia, and this process has accelerated in recent years and reached its peak in early 2020.

The president has come to value Belarus more and to emphasize nationalism as opposed to the previous rapprochement with Moscow.

In relation to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Lukashenko posed as a peacemaker. A representative documentation of that moment are the photos of the Minsk agreements: the Belarusian is the only one smiling (and the only one with great reasons for doing so). This intermediation provided an improvement in relations with the West, through which Lukashenko saw an opportunity to leave the Russian sphere of power. It was never a real break, but the Belarusian president thought he could benefit from both sides of the geopolitical dispute. He already enjoys an excellent relationship with China, a country that holds a number of investments in the country: the Chinese have built entire communities in Belarus inhabited by workers from China, and Xi Jinping was the first to congratulate Lukashenko on his victory in the highly contested 2020 elections.

The rapprochement with the West paid off: in the 2015 presidential election, the European Union praised Lukashenko for his stance, affirmed the legitimacy of the elections and based on that the EU canceled several of the sanctions that it still imposed on the country. Until then, Europeans had always condemned the electoral processes in Belarus and reaffirmed the claim that the country was the "last dictatorship in Europe". It seemed that the strategy was working, but the EU hoped that Lukashenko would continue to move away from Putin. He did follow this course even after the elections and the intensification of demonstrations. In January of this year, Lukashenko even accused the Kremlin of wanting to annex Belarus. Putin then cut subsidies, and the situation worsened until July, when Belarusians arrested several employees of a Russian security company on charges of promoting instability in the country, in order to provoke an intervention.

In the same period, Lukashenko had been leading the coronavirus crisis in a somewhat disastrous way, as reported by the whole world. This situation caused a sharp drop in popularity at a key moment, immediately before the elections. Several well-advised candidates with palpable ambitions emerged, in contrast to previous elections. The main ones were Viktar Babariko, a pro-Kremlin banker with connections to Gazprom; Valery Tsepkalo, former ambassador to the US and considered as a pro-Westcandidate; and Sergey Tikhonovski, a blogger who grew up on the wave of the anti-corruption agenda, analogous to Russian Aleksei Navalny. Lukashenko soon tried to neutralize his opponents: Babariko and Tikhonovski were arrested and Tsepkalo left the country. Among the charges was Russian interference through Gazprom, in conjunction with Babariko's candidacy. It is important to underline that even Tsepkalo, considered more pro-Western, took refuge in Moscow, where

he completed his training at the prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). The Western bloc remained silent during all these moments, as it understood that Lukashenko was the only person preventing Belarus from approaching the Russian Federation, which could lead to an eventual union between the two countries.

The wife of Tikhonovki, the self-declared housewife Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, then took on the candidacy and proceeded with the elections. Lukashenko won by more than 80%, under serious allegations of fraud. Tikhonovskaya filed a request for a recount of the votes and left Belarus for Lithuania, where she has been coordinating the effort to invalidate the election, now with open support from the EU. More recently, however, this relationship has been showing signs of fraying. Tikhonovskaya complained about empty words from European leaders which do not amount to effective actions against the Belarusian government. It is also important to note that the European Union and the United States only began to criticize Lukashenko very recently, when they realized the strength of the protests, and were also pushed into the scene by the anti-Russia coalition of countries such as the Baltic and Polish republics, which started to bet in the expansion of demonstrations and eventual contamination of Russia. From that moment on, the narrative turned 180 degrees, because intuitively, and poorly informed by the Western media, many believed that Putin's support for Lukashenko would last forever and the democratic West would never support the "last dictator in Europe".

Lukashenko himself changed his narrative. At the beginning of the protests, he even accused the Russians of being behind the demonstrations in an attempt to overthrow him. Some Western media replicated the conspiracy theories, even making comparisons with the Crimean "little green men". A Polish politician in the European Parliament even called for new sanctions against Russia, claiming Russian intervention against Lukashenko in Belarus. In recent months, Polish neo-Nazi groups have crossed borders to participate in demonstrations against Lukashenko. One of these fascists was beaten and ended up interviewed by the BBC, as if he were a simple victim of authoritarian violence in Belarus. After this escalation of events, Lukashenko decided to ask the Russians for support, having spoken to Putin several times expecting support. To date, it is unclear how and even if the Kremlin will take action. Russian media has covered the protests extensively and in a very positive tone in favor of the protesters, highlighting the violence of repression by the security forces, in clear contrast to the coverage of the protests in Ukraine in 2014.

The protesters themselves, as has always been the case in Eastern Europe, were quickly dominated by pro-Western liberals and conservative

nationalists. There were a few socialist voices, but they were silent. The opposition is still quite disorganized and Svetlana Tikhonovskaya has so far failed to establish itself as an effective leadership. The West is increasingly interfering with the situation, while the Russians are yet to make a move. The intensity of the protests has ups and downs, although there is an impression that the majority of the disaffected are concentrated in Minsk. Even without fraud, Lukashenko would still have obtained a majority of the votes, and his support base has not been completely eroded, even though his position seems increasingly isolated. He is trying to buy time with a referendum proposal, but there is still no conclusive maneuver towards it.

Moscow, December 15, 2020.

THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT: AN UNWANTED WAR FOR RUSSIA

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On November 9, 2020, after a short conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region (known to the Armenians as the Republic of Artsakh), Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a ceasefire treaty. In practice, this treaty represented a capitulation by Armenia, where even today thousands of protesters are mobilizing against the agreed terms and seek to provoke the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian. In Azerbaijan, the deal was received as a major victory and should guarantee President Ilham Aliyev a few more years of stability in power. Albeit in an uncertain way, the biggest regional powers are strengthened: Russia and Turkey.

The nature of the conflict, as well as the politics of the countries involved, is a topic far removed from the reality of Brazilians. The little news that arrives in the country comes filtered by the great media groups of the West. Therefore, this analysis seeks to present a brief overview of the situation, then to address issues such as the origins of the conflict, the role of the actors involved and the prospects from now on, thus demonstrating that the role of the Russian Federation in resolving the issue is not only central, but inevitable.

There is much debate among Western analysts about the origins of ethnic-religious conflicts in the Caucasus region, in particular the dispute between Armenians and Azeris. The fact is that the Caucasus is a strategic

territory and as such, the object of historic disputes. Between the Black and Caspian seas and cut by mountain ranges, the Caucasus has been coveted since the times of the Roman Empire and has attracted, over the centuries, invaders from different foreign powers. Its peculiar geographic characteristics, however, ensured that no foreign domain would last in the long run. On the other hand, the different ethnic groups that inhabit the region and, more importantly, the tensions between Christians and Muslims, made the Caucasus a boiling cauldron, always on the verge of overflowing. The present conflict is the result of centuries of conflicts and the ethnic-religious element is, therefore, central.

Tensions between Armenians and Azeris spilled over in the wake of the crisis in the USSR throughout the 1980s. The epicenter of these tensions is the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which is mostly Armenian and which in the 1920s was placed by Moscow under Azerbaijani administration. During that period, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia still formed a single Transcaucasian Republic within the Soviet Union, which was later divided into three republics with the same level of autonomy, with Nagorno-Karabakh still under Azerbaijan's control. Despite the discontent, this arrangement persisted in a peaceful manner until the final crisis of the communist regime, when, already in 1988, the altercations between the two peoples began. After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the situation quickly escalated to a war in which the Armenians not only seized Nagorno-Karabakh, but occupied territories around the exclave that had no borders with Armenia's main territory.

This situation of instability during the last years of the Soviet Union feeds a formula that, although recycled from the Cold War, is applied today, not only to the Caucasus, but also to Central Asia and other regions of the post-Soviet space. It is the idea that the USSR would have stimulated division and distrust between the different nationalities that made up its federal system so that internal conflicts could not be resolved without Moscow's intervention, being a variant of the British strategy of dividing and rule. The consequences of the Kremlin-sown cyan would be at the heart of the countless conflicts that still plague the former post-Soviet republics. This simplistic narrative would be the key to understanding conflicts ranging from Crimea to Chechnya, through Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria and, of course, Nagorno-Karabakh.

Such a formula ignores, however, centuries of wars, persecutions and strife which, in the case of the Caucasus, are even more relevant. For Christian civilizations in the region, Georgia and Armenia, the centuries leading up to the Soviet period were marked by domination by the Ottoman and Persian empires and by constant strife with the Muslim peoples of the North Caucasus. For the Armenians, these frictions culminated in a tragedy of extraordinary

proportions: the genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire from 1915. When we look at the whole picture that goes back to millennial conflicts in a region squeezed between great powers, it is not possible to ignore that the about 70 years of Soviet domination were marked by rare stability.

In line with this idea that the USSR was instrumental in creating the conditions that would lead to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, there is the imprecise narrative that the present performance of the Russian Federation has been poorly received by its Armenian allies. Much is speculated about the intentions of Vladimir Putin's government and its true relationship with the administration of Prime Minister Pashinian. In fact, Nikol Pashinian came to power in 2018 through protests that toppled the government of Serge Sarksian, a close ally of the Russians. Pashinian's previous performance as a parliamentarian sought closer ties to the United States and Europe, which at times generated the impression that his administration would move away from Russia. This factor, coupled with the arrest by the Pashinyan government of a major Russian ally in Armenian politics, former President Robert Kotcharyan[1], raised doubts about the new PM's willingness towards the Russian Federation. It is impossible to determine what the new prime minister of Armenia's initial intention was, but we can safely state that Nikol Pashinyan has tried on several occasions to signal that he would maintain the commitments between Russians and Armenians.

The situation in which Armenia is inserted makes the possibility of a rupture with the Russian Federation a geopolitical impossibility. As it was possible to see during the recent conflict, Armenia finds itself surrounded by two rivals, Turkey and Azerbaijan, at the same time that it maintains a relationship of little cooperation with Georgia. In fact, the only immediate neighbor with which Armenians cultivate proximity is Iran, with whom they share a small and vulnerable border, in a region now squeezed between territory recently recovered by Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhitchevan. Russia, for its part, despite having no borders with Armenia, maintains one of its only bases abroad in the second largest Armenian city, Gyumri. In addition, Armenia is a member, alongside with the Russian Federation, of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a military alliance that determines that its members have responsibility for intervention in the event of violation of the territory of any of the signatories. These guarantees, which do not extend to the occupied territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, are the main reason why Azerbaijan has no incentive to advance over Armenia's internationally recognized borders.

1 Available at: https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2019/11/13/pashinyan-otnosheniya-armenii-i-rossii-razvivayutsya-po-voshodyashchey

A sign that Nikol Pashinyan understands Armenia's delicate position are the numerous meetings held with Vladímir Putin[2], in a gesture that signaled to the Kremlin the intention to dispel rumors about an alleged shift in Armenian foreign policy. Similarly, there is no indication that popular opinion among Armenians has turned against Russia, despite the claims of Western media. In fact, a small number of diaspora members, some of whom have returned to Armenia in recent years, have mixed feelings about the Russian Federation, still rooted in animosities dating back to the Cold War. Among Armenians of Soviet origin, however, there is no sign of indisposition towards the Russians. Amid the former Soviet republics, Armenia has always figured as one that best preserves its historical ties with Russia. Although there was a feeling of abandonment by the allies, several testimonies collected after the signing of the ceasefire in early November demonstrate that this proximity has not been significantly affected. On the contrary, many Armenians, especially in Nagorno-Karabakh, are grateful and relieved by the arrival of Russian peacekeepers[3]. The demonstrations of support were such that the Western media was forced to change their initial narrative that the Kremlin's performance was being condemned by popular opinion.

However, the question remains why Pashinian did not turn to the Russians earlier in the conflict. While it may seem surprising how quickly Azerbaijan troops advanced over the mountainous terrain of Nagorno-Karabakh, there was no doubt about the superiority of Azerbaijan's current military capabilities. For its part, Russia maintains good relations with both sides, but has formal obligations to Armenia, reinforced by the presence of a military base in the country. Pashinian's position was further weakened after the Russian president said that, even at the beginning of hostilities, he would have convinced Ilham Aliyev to stop the advance of his troops, so that Azerbaijan would take only a small portion of Karabakh's territory. Its Armenian counterpart would have found the terms unacceptable, which led to the imposition of much tougher terms, which include the loss of the city of Shushi and the guarantee of passage through the Lachin corridor. This statement goes against the idea that the Russians would have let the situation escalate, in order to reaffirm the dependence of the Caucasian country on the Russian Federation.

In any case, Nikol Pashinian is unlikely to survive the political crisis triggered by the vexing conditions in which Armenia was forced to drop its weapons. The increasingly bellicose rhetoric of Aliyev and his ally Erdogan,

2 Available at: https://www.rbc.ru/politics/28/07/2020/5f1fde1e9a7947a5443a2706?from=-from_main_1

3 Available at: https://www.rt.com/russia/507196-armenia-ally-gratitude-survey/

demonstrated with pomp at a military parade held in Baku and on repeated occasions in recent weeks, as well as skirmishes between the parties to the conflict has tested the limits of the ceasefire agreement. Episodes such as the attempt to seize a gold mining area in Sotk and villages south of the Lachin corridor, both regions belonging to the main territory of Armenia, prompted the Russians to expand the area where peacekeepers operate. Similarly, it is the Kremlin's action that prevents Turkey from further imposing its authority in the Caucasus.

The presence of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh is a reality that is expected to last for years to come. It remains to be seen whether it will not generate friction that will jeopardize the country's good relations with Azerbaijan, and more importantly, whether it will not revive animosities with Turkey. At the present time, Russia is the only guarantee of non-violation of Armenia's territorial integrity, however bitter this arrangement may seem to Yerevan.

Moscow, December 15, 2020

STRATEGIC LESSONS OF WORLD WAR II, 75 YEARS LATER

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World War II was the largest and most lethal conflagration in history. In addition to spreading across the globe, it also stood out for its magnitude and intensity. It is estimated that it directly involved more than 100 million people and caused 85 million deaths, with nuclear weapons being used for the first time. Seventy-five years after its end, and just over a century after the end of World War I, the world finds itself again in a spiral of tensions that may, once again, lead to a world war. This is the main significance of World War II today, since the roots of the current tensions can be found in the strict balance that led to that conflagration and the Cold War that followed.

The term "balancing" expresses, in a broad sense, the notion that states compete with one another, seeking to limit each other's freedom of action, which may involve the possibility of threat or use of force - in the latter case, we have an example of what is now called strict balancing. In this way, in its broad sense, balancing is confused with the concept of International Relations as it is. In its strict sense, it can be characterized by intimidation or

blackmail. Thus, it is reasonable to correlate broad balancing with deterrence, and strict balancing with intimidation (compellence). Of course, the exercise of intimidation requires an overabundance of strength. Hence why Great Powers use "delegates", that is, allies who are employed to "share the burden" of security costs. Such an international division of security workload sometimes ends up endowing those allies with capabilities that allow them to take a challenging stance.

This was the case for Germany, Italy and Japan - the defying powers in World War II. Unified Germany, which resulted from the British desire to balance France - a role originally performed by Prussia - ended up becoming a more formidable power than the former. Japan, intending to maintain China subdued (1894-95) and balance Russia (1904-05) and the USSR (1918-25), ended up wrecking British naval hegemony. British squadrons in the Indian and Far East, Forces A, B and Z - which amounted to almost two centuries of British naval hegemony - were destroyed in a short period of time (10/12/1941 to 10/04/1942). Even when it comes to Italy, to a considerable extent, the same process unfolded As a consequence, after the outbreak of World War II, the British Admiralty considered Italy the greatest threat to the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean. Hence the surprise attack carried out by the British in Taranto (11-12/11/1940).

With the benefit of temporal distance, it can be said that this small group of nation-states never had a chance against the three region-states (US, Russia and China) and the British Empire, which allied against them. This, of course, does not diminish the merit or heroism of those who fought against the Axis. However, even in the darkest moments that followed the Axis effulgent victories in the 1940-41 biennium, few doubted the allies' final victory. In this sense - and Paulo Visentini was one of the first to unveil this in Brazil - World War II concealed another "war", the one waged between the allies themselves. In particular, Britain's war against the USSR and China. The conduct adopted by the English, despite being clumsy - since it prolonged the conflagration -, must be considered as a characteristic of the strict balance approach.

The British approach was almost the opposite of the one adopted by the Americans. The Americans began to plan the opening of the second front against Germany in the heat of the Battle of Moscow (1941). In 1942, *Operation Sledgehammer* was organized and *Operation Roundup* was planned for 1943. Both were aimed at the invasion of Europe by southern France. Both attempts ended up being frustrated by the British, in favor of the invasion of North Africa via *Operation Torch* (1942). In addition to the projected second front, which aimed to alleviate the USSR, the US promoted the Loan-Lease

Act. It was decisive for the Soviet and Chinese war efforts, and in the latter country, the US maintained close relations not only with the nationalists, but also with the communists. In short, the predominant approach adopted by the US, even in the midst of the conflagration, was that of engagement or cooperation, not that of strict balancing.

The diplomatic bargain undertaken by Brazil also illustrates engagement and not strict balancing. It was thanks to the close relations, originally maintained with both Germany and the US, that Brazil obtained the resources and technology to build the Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional in Volta Redonda. Vargas and Góes Monteiro used military preparation and the war to insert Brazil virtuously into the Second Industrial Revolution, characterized by the dominance of steel and electricity.

It was thanks to this engagement that the *Pax Americana* was established - the reconstruction of Germany and Japan that gave the US the status of world hegemon. The Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe allowed the US to bring under its command all the preceding naval hegemonies: Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and England. In this way, it is clear that cooperation, or engagement, is much more effective for the exercise of domination than strict confrontation or balancing. However, shortly after Churchill's speech in Fulton (1946) - which influenced the announcement of the Truman Doctrine (1947) -, the US began to adopt balancing, in a strict sense, as the dominant behavior towards the USSR and China. This policy was implemented throughout the Cold War period (1945-1991).

And, again, strict balancing would prove to be flawed. To defeat the USSR, a state that never exceeded the average of 9.5% of world GDP, the US converted China and Europe into economic superpowers. In short, they created more capable opponents than the one they intended to overcome. Even after the USSR debacle, the US maintained a stance of strict balancing. Instead of a new version of the Marshall Plan, which would finance the conversion of the Soviet economy to traditional capitalism, military and diplomatic pressure intensified with the expansion of NATO to the East and the pursuit of nuclear primacy. Today the USSR is reborn in the form of the Russian Federation and is, once again, a formidable adversary. Precisely thanks to the capabilities it has reactively developed to the expansion of NATO and the American search for nuclear primacy. China, in turn, maintained a dependent-associated relationship with the US until the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade (1999) and the announcement of the *Pivot to Asia* (2011). It should be noted that the Chinese Navy, which today threatens the US Navy in the Indo-Pacific, has only been built since 2011.

In short, strict balancing proves to be, more than flawed,

counterproductive. In the long run, it produces results opposite to what was originally intended. Prussia, which Britain used to balance France, in becoming Germany became a more imposing opponent than France had ever been. Japan, used to subdue China and balance Russia, ended up destroying the British Navy in the Indo-Pacific (something that Imperial China or Tsarist Russia never dared to dream of).

During World War II, the procrastination in opening the second front to wage the terrestrial war on the European continent, leaving the USSR alone in the fight against Germany, allowed it to rise as a Superpower. A more formidable opponent than Germany was at any time, endowed with thermonuclear warheads, the USSR was capable of destroying the US - a capacity that Germany never possessed. Adopting anAmerican perspective, Europe and China, used to defeat the USSR in the Cold War, became economic superpowers - being the former also capable of disputing American soft power. Finally, Germany and Russia, against which the two largest global coalitions in history were articulated by Anglo-Saxon efforts, today retain their capabilities and the conditions to become, in the case of the first, or consolidate, in the case of the latter, themselves as Great Powers.

However, the gravestelement is that the main result of strict balancing was the decline of the West. As Jeffrey Sachs and Steven Radelet[4] pointed out: in 1820, the West had just over 15% of the world's population and 25% of its income. Already in 1950, due to the effects of the Industrial Revolutions, the nations of the West held only 17% of the world population, but already concentrated 56% of the income. Currently[5], the West (European Union and North America combined) correspond to 33% of world income and 18% of its population. While the economies of the Asia-Pacific contribute 44% of income and 60% of the population. Taking only East Asia (China, Japan and South Korea) into account, it already contributes with 25% of world income and only 21% of the population. Thus, it is necessary to conclude that, due to its virtuous insertion in the Third Industrial Revolution (microelectronics), Asia progressively recovers its role in world income before the Industrial Revolutions.

Such lessons matter to Brazil, insofar as one can take advantage of the new international situation through engagement, neutrality and diplomatic bargaining. It couldn't be different. If World War II, waged by region-states against relatively small nation-states, produced 85 million deaths, what

4 Radelet, S., Sachs, J. Asia's Reemergence. F*oreign Affairs*, [s. l.], v. 76, n. 6, p. 44–59.

5 Source of the data, 2017: United States. Country Comparison: GDP (Purchasing Power Parity). CIA World Fact Book. 2020. United Nations (UN). *World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision*. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2013.

to expect from a dispute involving the US, Russia and China? In addition, Brazil has economic interdependence ties with both the US and China. Not to mention external financing that depends on an abundance of liquidity, which would simply cease to exist under the aegis of a conflagration. Nonetheless, it is necessary to take advantage of the situation of international tension, aiming, with the use of diplomatic bargaining, the recovery of the national economy, especially reindustrialization. In the same way that Vargas gained control of electricity, cement and steel, only waging in the war after it was already defined, we must obtain control of the computer (microprocessors), the network (5G Internet) and automation (Artificial Intelligence and robotics). And, thus, successfully inserting ourselves in the Third Industrial Revolution.

Porto Alegre, December 14, 2020