

Integration: alternative to *Rambonization*

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The attack carried out by the Colombian army against a clandestine FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) camp in Ecuadorian territory, in the morning of March 1, 2008, involved not only a violation of the sovereignty and territory of a country and also of several basic principles of international law, as defined in the Charters of the United Nations and the OAS (Organization of American States), but also a turning point, which may be definitive, in the contemporary historical process of Latin America.

The attack, which took place in the eve of the bicentennial of Independence (2009 for Ecuador and 2010 for most of the other countries in the region), represented a multiple blow to the dreams of continental integration, fed during two centuries by the chief leaders of the struggle for American independence, which were in full process of revival under diverse proposals which reveal that the countries of this huge subcontinent are capable of independently targeting and guiding their destiny,

especially their longed for destiny of integration, without any tutelage foreign to the reality and the fundamental principles of its inhabitants.

Within minutes, under the fire of 186-kg GBU 12 Paveway II bombs, launched at the encampment of the irregular forces with the aid of the newest warfare technology—laser aided, GPS or ultra sensory—some of these initiatives seemed to capsize: the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Bank of the South, the projects for South American energy and territorial integration. Even the Andean Community (CAN) has felt the impact, the immediate consequence of which was the rupture of diplomatic relations between Colombia and Ecuador.

Within minutes, the world conflict between the West and Islamic fundamentalism, known as the war against terrorism, suddenly appeared in the South American scene, to the tone of anti-principles such as “preemptive war”, the subjectivity of national sovereignty and

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disregard for the pronouncements of international organizations, all under the concept of a controversial extension of the notion of the right to legitimate defense and the preservation of state security against the so called “new threats”, wherever they might be. A world vision that does not recognize borders or the right of others; in sum, a *Rambonization*, as we shall explain later, of international politics.

What happened in that morning of March 1 merits an examination from different viewpoints: a bilateral one, in that which pertains to the relations and common history of these two countries; a regional perspective, which became evident in the forums of the OAS and the Rio Group; and also, a look from outside the region or the hemisphere, because of what we have called an abrupt and ominous insertion of our regional problems in the framework of a worldwide confrontation which is not ours to fight.

In the globalization era

All of this seems to take root in, and take a hold of, the real symptoms of what we call globalization, which coincides historically over time and sustains the triumphant expansion of financial capital and transnational companies worldwide.

Globalization, as the climax of a centuries-long historical process, takes shape in the new social and cultural conditions set up by the technical and scientific revolution, which is to say, thanks to the momentous advance of high technology and the contraction of the world down to a global village which implies, in the realm of communications, an universality, as well as the instantaneous transmission and reception of information, in real time, from anywhere in the world.

Heinz Dieterich says, “While the agrarian revolution planted man in the ground and industrial revolution concentrated him in the cities, the semiotic revolution frees him from the limits of time and space”.¹

This historical coincidence of globalization and the redeployment of transnational financial domination generates, for the central countries which are the bedrock of expansive transnational capital, capabilities such as, for example, the tendency to standardize or to categorize under a single cultural standard (which is dictated by the center of world power) all human behaviors and expressions in the planet. It really is a worldwide structure where multinational companies control global economic relations according to their interests. Under this perspective, the state becomes relative and

¹ Noam Chomsky and Heinz Dieterich, *La aldea global*, Ediciones Txalaparta, Buenos Aires, September 2001, sixth edition.

ceases to matter, except as guarantor or manager of their activities.

The logic of this expansion is the logic of war, not for territories anymore, as it was until the mid 20th century, but for control of the international markets. The strategic objectives of the players in this war –the transnational corporations– know no limits. The logical forefront of this war is high technology, and behind it, but unquestionably crucial, is the production of other articles of mass consumption. According to Dieterich², Japan and USA, which in the ‘70s proclaimed the information society, are in the forefront, while Europe and the former USSR still placed their bets on the production of steel and energy. All of this does not impede US globalization strategists, when they see their security threatened, or need a threat against the consolidation of the military-industrial complex, to step into the physical, real terrain of war in military terms (examples: the intervention in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan).

Ever since September 11, 2001, that is, as a reaction against the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, this war took the shape of a global war on terrorism. This struggle was centered on a large-scale conflict between the West and Isla-

mic fundamentalism. “The priority that the fight against drug trafficking had been since the end of the Cold War was overshadowed by the need to fight a much more powerful and merciless enemy” –according to Alfredo Toro Hardy³. Drug trafficking was only important if it was associated with terrorism, but even so it was Islamic terrorism that mattered. That implied a decrease in the attention given to Latin America, with a manifest reduction of the emphasis placed on Colombia”.

Thus we see the existence of a single power sustained by three mutually intertwined dimensions: cultural, military and economic, the latter being the beginning and end of the other two. In the cultural domain we see the imposition of archetypes pertaining to the most trivial mass culture, but very efficient in the expansion of markets to unimaginable limits. In the military we see the consistent application of the doctrine of “preemptive war” and unilateralism, ostensibly since the war in Afghanistan and the intervention in Iraq.

“The massification of informational cultural archetypes throughout the world increases the value or creates added values which exceed the ratio of price to quality of merchandise and services on a global sca-

² Noam Chomsky and Heinz Dieterich, *Op. cit.*

³ Alfredo Toro Hardy, *La era de las aldeas*, Villegas Editores, Bogotá, 2002.

le. One prominent example of that economic phenomenon could be one movie, *Rambo*, which in the eighties simultaneously created two global cultural archetypes: it put both big muscles and fatigues in fashion. Because of the informational effect of a motion picture, worldwide demand for the triggers of both fashions (a service and a merchandise) increased without any additional advertising costs. Name brands and intellectual property of luxury garments worldwide, without major advertising costs, can make profits upwards of a thousand percent above production costs. Cell phones are a cultural archetype used worldwide and only the brands of the telephones are subject to mass advertising”.⁴

“*Rambonization*” is the culture of the masses; “*Rambonization*” of international politics via the “legitimization” of the so-called preemptive war doctrine, which includes the possibility of promoting operations of any kind in any place, making the sovereignty of countries a relative concept and ignoring the principles of international law.

Latin-Americanization of world conflict

Suddenly, in the morning of March 1, a field operation in fo-

reign soil carried out by the Colombian army would also seem to be an attempt to internationalize that country’s internal conflict, which remains unresolved after 60 years. But above all, given its characteristics and the reasons put forward by those who carried it out, it brings the war against terrorism to the Latin American scene. In other words, the confrontation between the West, especially the US, and Islamic fundamentalism. We have gone from the reduction of the attention given by the US to Colombia immediately after 9/11, mentioned by Toro Hardy, to the geometric expansion of military aid to this country, largely as a result of the concept of a military solution implemented by president Uribe since he took office. An exponential increase in military aid which has not had positive results in the war against drug trade. According to data provided by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the extent of coca crops in Colombia remains extremely high at 78,000 ha.

Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, specialist in International Relations at the University of San Andres in Buenos Aires, compares the present situation to that pertaining to Cuba in the 1960s, in the middle of the Cold War. “In the sixties” –he says⁵– the Cold War came to Latin America

⁴ Claudio Salomón, *Expansión cultural e informativa y asimetrización económica global*, Ediciones Suárez, Mar del Plata, 2008.

⁵ Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, *La OEA y la nueva guerra*, article published in the newspaper “La Nación”, Buenos Aires, March 28, 2008.

first as a result of the Cuban revolution, and of the OAS resolution which expelled Cuba from the inter American system. “All (Latin) American countries, at different times and with different intensity, suffered the consequences of this fact: natural internal conflicts were interpreted and handled under the light of the uncompromising rivalry between East and West; there were deaths and massive disappearances in several generations; the vision of an enemy instead of a rival became the norm in politics; human rights were violated systematically”. The doctrine of national security was a result of that extension of the Cold War to the Latin American stage, which “was lethal –underscores Tokatlian– and contributed decisively to the democratic collapse in the region”, as well as the ensuing economic and social stagnation.

“The way in which Reyes was killed and the subsequent diplomatic handling of the incident convey, in a symbolic way –says Tokatlian with regards to the events of March 1– a similar and alarming message: today we run the risk of Latin-Americanizing the ‘war against terrorism’”.

More than the possible proliferation of military and punitive actions like the one that took place in Angostura –the spot where the clandestine FARC camp was located– this sort of Latin-Americanization of

the war against terrorism can cause other harmful effects. Tokatlian mentions several: “the fabrication” of new enemies in a continent with serious problems of inequity and exclusion; the construction of supposed connections among agents that resort to terror, criminal activities, rebel forces, groups outcast from society and dissidents; violation of international law and deployment of preventive military force as standard practice.

That is, the *Rambonization* of international politics in Latin America.

Risky modification of traditional paradigms

Until March 1, 2008, the pressing problems of Latin America were seen in a traditional archetypal perspective, that is to say, a regional one. Even if there is a deep asymmetry in the economic potential within the region, the challenges continue to be the eradication of poverty and the search for development, for which several alternatives have been developed. Among them, integration plays an increasingly greater role. There are no religious or racial conflicts in the region as in other parts of the world, and the causes of conflict in the past, mostly caused by the dismemberment of the Spanish Empire in the 19th century are being resolved: between Bolivia, Chile and Peru,

between Ecuador and Peru, between Argentina and Chile, between Brazil and Bolivia, etc. The exception is the internal conflict in Colombia.

What happened in the remote jungle of Angostura radically modifies the outlook. It introduces the ghost of world conflict into the handling of pending affairs and threatens to thoroughly affect the entire spectrum of relations within the countries of the region.

It brings to the Latin American stage dangerous concepts, such as the “clash between civilizations” proclaimed by Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard University:

“For peoples who search for their identity and reinvent their ethnicity, enemies are essential, and the most potentially dangerous enmities will happen along the lines of rupture already existing among the main civilizations of the world”. The truth is that culture and cultural identity, which in a broader sense are civilizing entities, are shaping the tempo of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-Cold War world”⁶.

This perspective seems to prevail in the background of the struggle between the so-called Western pragmatism and Islamic fundamen-

talism, under the motto of the war on terrorism, but it distorts the real and deep line of conflict in the world today: the diversity of interests between the countries of the first world and those in the second, third and fourth worlds.

A perspective which, moreover, becomes risky at a time where the rise of indigenous movements, a characteristic of Latin America in recent years, should not be seen in terms of confrontation but as an historical opportunity that highlights what we are: multinational and multicultural countries, whose recognition as such, that is, the acceptance of our diversity, constitutes one way of facing the challenges of globalization.

It is a quite complex reality that cannot be addressed with a simplistic vision which excludes the “other” and classifies conflicts from a purely fundamentalist perspective, but forces us to probe deeply into these problems, and requires more than ever the need to persist in the process of integration as a means to overcome challenges and act efficiently in the globalized world scene.

An interesting article pertaining to this process by Samuel Pinheiro Guimaraes, Foreign Vice Minister of Brazil⁷, states:

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *El choque de civilizaciones y la reconfiguración del orden mundial*, Editorial Paidós, Barcelona, 1997.

⁷ Samuel Pinheiro Guimaraes, *El mundo multipolar y la integración sudamericana*, in *Res Diplomática (RD)*, Revista del Instituto del Servicio Exterior de la Nación (ISEN), Buenos Aires, August 2007.

“In the field of politics, integration mechanisms should stimulate cooperation of South American countries in forums, disputes and international negotiations, promote the peaceful settlement of conflicts, without the interference of powers outside the region, with the total and rigorous respect for the principles of non-intervention and self-rule, i.e., no state and even less Brazil should delve into the domestic problems of neighboring countries or try to export political models, no matter how much we value them for internal use.”

Law and integration against *Rambo*-ization

The swift reaction of the institutional mechanisms for dialogue and conflict resolution in the hemisphere (OAS and the Rio Group), where the Colombian intervention was rejected and chastised, was doubtlessly positive, because it curbed the possibility of an escalation of conflicts and restored the adherence to the principles of international law as established in the charters of the UN and the OAS. It also brought to light the understandable caution and concern caused by an event that, as stated at the beginning of this article, could imply a serious turning point in the treatment of international conflict in the Latin American subcontinent. But the reticence of the United States to agree with the other countries

opens a dangerous rift and should lead to a deep examination of the policies which should be developed to consolidate the rule of law, the basic principles that enlighten civilized coexistence, and face up to emerging barbarity. It should lead us to rethink the concept of Latin America in the eve of the bicentennial of independence and the celebration of the ideals that sustained that historical feat.

In this sense, more than the resolve to adhere to the law, the determination to continue the efforts for the integration of our peoples and countries becomes especially important. Colombia included, the ideal for integration is still a driving force for harmonious development, fruitful coexistence and peace. It is an antidote to the threats of using force to solve prevailing problems. If the Colombian conflict is to have a long-lasting solution, it must not be accomplished by force but by way of negotiations, mutual compromises and a new vision of the future ushered by the international community.

Latin America, which in recent years has had sustained growth, but still has not overcome the tremendous deficits of social exclusion and basic needs, eradication of poverty, disregard for human rights, etc., cannot afford the luxury of going back several light years in the road to development, allowing the intru-

sion of warlike measures that deeply threaten all that has been built and that needs to be built in these critical years.

In the face of this, there is a need to enhance and use all the tools that have been developed and organized in the relations between countries. Not only the respect for the principles of law, but the thorough enforcement of the diverse mechanisms that can prevent conflicts and assure a real peace zone for the region: confidence-building measures, transparency in the evaluation and exchange of information about military forces and weapons, security protocols between armed forces, the mechanisms for consultations and political consensus, systematic meetings between Foreign Ministers and Defense Secretaries under the 2+2 formula, bilateral cabinet meetings, and mainly the many modalities of integration, in which the region has a vast experience, which should not be forgotten or wasted.

In the military field, there must be the will to rely on initiatives such as the Crisis Detection Centers, which operate in the realm of the European Security Strategy with a goal that fully corresponds to the spirit of integration that should prevail in Latin America: the treatment of possible threats or conflicts from a regional perspective, avoiding them under the principles of law and obligations

acquired through diplomatic channels. In other words, in a multilateral framework with the concurrence of civil and military actors.

There are enough dark clouds in the social and economic realms that darken the proximity of the bicentennial of political independence of the peoples of the continent to allow war in its most perverse fashion to expand and defame its wonderful and boundless geography. This has just been pointed out by Felipe Gonzalez, former president of Spain, in his speech at the Foro Iberoamerica, held in Rhode Island, USA. According to him, “globalization has generated a system of connections of such nature that nobody will be safe from the troubles that start to emerge in the world economy as a result of internal crises in the United States and European countries like Spain.” “What has been created up to this point in the 20th century,” says Gonzalez, “is new world disorder, with mounting problems in government and uncertainty of the elements of world governance” (a horrible world, I would say).

Because of all this, now more than ever, it is essential to employ the reasons of law and humanity to face the ghost of *Rambronization*, that is, the ghost of barbarity.

