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The Russian Federation's Aggression against Ukraine – an attack against the international law-based security system

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Abstract

In the realistic paradigm within the discipline of international relations in which states act based on a lucid and rational analysis of their own interests, the actions of the Russian Federation at the international level can be given justifications located in a gray area characterized by imprecision par excellence, between the necessity of ensuring its own security and the desire to dominate the space adjacent to its imperial center. In this context, the boundary between the prevalence of the conceptions specific to the natural law that determine the specified actions and the manifest justification of real interests based on these conceptions blurs in turn. What persists is Russia's refusal to accept a rules-based international order, seen as a conceptual framework of America in particular and Western origin in general. In this context, Russia takes, at least on a superficial level, the desideratum of such an international order, but interprets it through its own filter, based in particular on natural law.

Keywords:
Russia; realism; constructivism; natural law; use of force; international order; positive law.

We are living moments[1] that we never wanted to witness. More than a year and a half ago, invoking historical reasons and pretexts of public international law, the president of the Russian Federation decided to turn into reality what many of us did not think would happen again, despite numerous warnings. He decided, specifically, to launch a military aggression against a sovereign state, so that it could not freely exercise the attributes of national sovereignty, as defined in international agreements.

[1] At the time of writing these lines.

Of course, even simply stating these reasons might seem absurd. In the year 2023, we claim the fact that international relations work based on international law. This is because, after the devastating experience of the Second World War, the representatives of the world's states realized that, in the absence of international law, the only basis on which interactions between states are carried out is force. However, resorting to force in the context of the 20th and the 21st centuries' technological advances leads to such a scale of loss of life and material destruction that it becomes simply unacceptable.

Yet not all international actors accept the preeminence of international law over force, when it comes to the pursuit of their interests or, if they accept it at a theoretical level, they give it such valences that its primary purpose – that of contributing to building a climate of peace and global security – is undermined to the point of dissolution. The most often used reason for this rejection is the assumption that the law-based international order concept is used as an instrument for promoting "*the application of uniform juridical solutions to different social and cultural contexts*" (Popa 2016, 61), and even for imposing a world order in which "*the 'market' values and criteria such as efficiency and utility tend to obscure and even to replace non-market values like social solidarity, equity or civic engagement, changing the allocation of resources within society*" (Popa 2021, 81). For example, in one of his speeches, delivered during the conflict[2], the president of the Russian Federation challenged the very rules-based international order and, implicitly, expressed his preference or support for an international order based on force (as the only alternative to the rules-based international order). Such behavior is, in of itself, a source of threats to the security of states and the system but, when it originates from one of the most powerful states in the system, it becomes a threat, directly or indirectly, to almost all other actors.

[2] For further relevant aspects from the speech, see Gabriel Glickman, Putin rejecting the rules-based global order makes the world more dangerous, https://www.washingtonpost.com/made-by-history/2022/10/16/putin-rejecting-rules-based-global-order-makes-world-more-dangerous/, 16.10.2022, accessed 04.09.2023.

International law is, however, governed by a series of fundamental principles. Among these, the principle of sovereign equality of states is so important that it was enshrined in Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, which can be considered the "constitution" of the international community. Also, in the same article, another defining principle of international law is

enshrined, namely that of not resorting to force or the threat of force. Both principles are being violated in a blatant and inconceivable way these days.

Thus, what we have now is a confrontation between two paradigms of international law, namely the positivist one – expressed by the Western side – confronted with a naturalistic paradigm portrayed by Russia. Moreover, this cleavage has much deeper roots, with the positivist paradigm originating around warfare law and being used by the Western states. On the other hand, Russia has always expressed a leaning towards the area of natural law, the most obvious being through the leitmotifs used over time. From the concept of the Third Rome to the pan-Slavism of the 19th century, Russia used various concepts that were established around the "divine rule" concept and the ideas expressed within natural law. Of course, these two forms – positivist and, respectively, naturalist – are not the only ones under which the divergences, at the perceptual and conceptual level, between Russia and the Western states can be shown, but it is a significant and quite recurring one, especially at the historiographical level.

Positive law and natural law, as conceptual foundations of the international order based on norms, respectively of the one based on force

In this sense, we have chosen to illustrate the two paradigms by referring to the theoretical foundation of each of their leading representatives. Thus, for the part of positive law, Cornelius van Bynkershoek was elected, and for natural law, Moses Maimonides. Considered to be one of the important jurists of the 18th century, Cornelius van Bynkershoek contributed to the development of international law. Van Bynkershoek's influences can be found in the areas of public law, maritime law, and positive law (Aksashi 1998, passim). Also, the 18th century was the period in which the foundations of the school of legal positivism were laid – another important point that would influence the activity of jurists from that period.

Moses ben Maimon – known as Maimonides – is most often identified with his works in theology, philosophy, or astronomy, but he also made important contributions to law. Among these lay his ideas regarding natural law. Working in the twelfth century, Maimonides already had a complex and rich material regarding natural law, in that the study – and the incipient ideas that had founded it – originated in Ancient Greece.

Through the representativeness that both van Bynkershoek and Maimonides bring to positive law, respectively natural law, the theoretical foundation of the two highlighted paradigms is provided. The representativeness derives from considerations of importance in the field as well as from their contributions in the respective areas. Thus, van Bynkershoek tried to clarify certain concepts and visions

of positivism, using a methodology that allowed him to have an overall perspective on positivism and, above all, a highly developed critical apparatus – hence the elements of subtlety in the understanding of international law in his vision, such as the usage or importance of reason and the customary norm. On the other hand, Maimonides was able to understand, assimilate and use the elements of natural law described by his predecessors to formulate his own vision on this issue. From Plato and Aristotle to Zeno and Chrysippus and up to the patristic works, elements within them can be found – in different forms – in the works and ideas of Maimonides dealing with natural law; a vision that incorporates an incipient utilitarianism, generalities and particularities of laws, society's morality, political context and interdependent relationships (Miller 2019, passim).

The Russian Federation and behavior based on the law of force in international relations. Russia and natural law

If, under the principle of sovereign equality, each state enjoys exactly the same capacity to acquire rights and assume international obligations as other states, if each state is permitted any conduct that does not contravene international law, and if, in the same idea, no state can be prohibited from taking any action consistent with this set of rules, under what principle can Russia arrogate its claim to censor another state's elections according to its own interests? The absurdity of such a claim might seem obvious, if we did not consider the fact that, for Russia, *all states are equal, but some are more equal than others,* a situation that can only occur in a force-based international order, in which a state's ability to realize its interests is directly proportional to its ability to impose constraints on the will of another state, compared to the rules-based international order, in which international law imposes constraints on the actions of states, and the latter act to influence the will of other participants in international relations in order to enact norms of international law[3] consistent with their interests or to interpret the existing ones in this way.

[3] Because, after all, states are the creators of international law.

Although the pursuit of one's interests is present in both situations, it can be observed that the second paradigm leads to the pursuit of them in a peaceful manner, in the absence of the use of force, which significantly reduces the number and intensity of threats to the security of international actors and the system as a whole, by comparison with the first situation.

The problem that the West encounters in the desired (and absolutely natural) transformation of Russia into an international actor that no longer represents a threat to its immediate neighbors and even to the most distant ones is that Russia perceives its ancient (but especially since the Napoleonic invasion of

the early 19th century) security interests as necessarily contrary to those of most other states (or at least of those who do not accept its dominance).

More precisely, Russia perceives its security as being in direct relation to its ability to threaten states from which it perceives any threat, including the use of its full military capability (which also includes „strategic deterrence forces" – to be read as *nuclear weapons*) against the respective states. In other words, Russia feels safe when it can threaten other international actors with the use of force. Any move by them to strengthen their ability to resist Russian threats is seen by Russia as a threat to their security. In simple, non-academic but eloquent wording, Russia sends the following message: *strengthening your defense ability threatens me because it reduces my ability to threaten you.*

Hence the insistence with which Russia rejects the accession to NATO of its neighboring states. Claiming that the NATO accession of these states would be a political-military maneuver preceding an armed attack against Russia is nothing more than a manipulative speech so obvious that only die-hard followers of Putinist Eurasianism could be influenced by such claims[4]. The provisions of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty are formulated clearly enough to exclude the application of the provision in question with a view to offensive action by the Alliance against any enemy. Instead, the provisions of the same article include the obligation of common defensive actions, in the event of an armed attack directed against any member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

[4] But we are not concerned with them, as their Putinism is so aggressive that they would be willing to support any nonsense promoted by Moscow.

Moreover, in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty[5], the references to the defensive nature of the actions that can be initiated under the rule of the article in question are all the clearer, as they are supplemented with the explicit mention of the fact that the respective actions fall within the set of individual or collective *self-defence* measures allowed under the rule of article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

[5] Which, for more clarity, we reproduce below:

"The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them, in Europe or North America, shall be considered an attack against all of them, and accordingly agree that, if such armed attack occurs, each of them, in the exercise of the right to individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, shall support the Party or Parties attacked by taking immediately, individually or jointly with the other Parties, any action it deems necessary, including the use of force armies, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.
Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council. These measures will cease after the Security Council adopts the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security."

The provisions of this article[6] similarly allow Art. 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the member states of the United Nations Organization to carry out defensive military actions only in the situation in which an armed attack is executed against them, and under the condition of their immediate cessation if the UN Security Council orders measures to combating the armed aggression in question.
We see, in the cited provisions, only references to the notion of self-defense. In this case, why is Russia so concerned about the accession of its neighboring states to NATO? Why is it so vehemently opposing this? Why does it view the accession in question as a threat to its security?

Obviously, it is not to be found by installing US offensive nuclear weapons on the territory of these states. The experience of the more than 30 years that have passed since the breakup of the Soviet Union has not revealed any example of the installation of nuclear weapons on the territory of the former communist or ex-Soviet states that have acquired the status of NATO members. Moreover, we wonder why Russia is so concerned about this possibility but does not perceive, as a similar threat, the presence of American nuclear weapons in Turkey which, although not bordering Russia, is at a short distance, in strategic terms, of the Russian state.

It is known that, since the 1950s, Turkey has hosted various types of American nuclear weapons, from ballistic missiles to bombs that remain today in the warehouses of the American base at Incirlik. However, a relatively simple analysis of documents published by, for example, the website "nsarchive.gwu.edu" shows how, after the end of the Cold War, the number and power of US nuclear weapons deployed in Turkey and Western Europe were only reduced from the nuclear-tipped ballistic missile systems present in Turkey until the breakup of the USSR, to an estimated 20 aircraft-launched nuclear-tipped bombs. Moreover, a similar trend followed the American nuclear weapons deployed in Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands. So, from Russia's perspective, despite the accession of Eastern European states to NATO, the intensity of the nuclear threat coming from the United States of America not only *did not increase* after the collapse of the USSR, *but actually decreased!*

In addition to this idea, in the period after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the United States and the other NATO member nuclear powers did not use the nuclear threat and did not make interpretable public references related to the use of this weaponry. According to (online) open sources (Blume 2022), the last American nuclear test took place almost 30 years ago, on September 23, 1992. Since then, the

[6] Which, similarly, we reproduce below:

"Nothing in this Charter shall affect the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense in the event of an armed attack against a Member of the United Nations, until such time as the Security Council shall have taken the necessary measures for the maintenance of international peace and security. The measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately brought to the attention of the Security Council and shall in no way affect the power and duty of the Security Council under this Charter to take such action as it may deem necessary at any time for maintaining or restoring international peace and security."

United States has not tested a new nuclear device, thus demonstrating the departure from the logic of the nuclear threat. As for Russia, the state's opacity and reluctance to provide such information make it difficult to identify nuclear tests, but several open sources (Sanger and Kramer 2019; Petrescu 2019), tend to place the latest Russian nuclear test no earlier than 2019, assuming that the so-called *Nenoska Incident* was generated by such an action.

As for the threat of using nuclear weapons, this, too, seems to be a monopoly of the Russian Federation, a monopoly unchallenged by the states of the Western world. Incidentally, to locate the most recent (for, unfortunately, we do not expect it to be the last) threats by Russia to use nuclear weapons, we need not go back in time earlier than at the time of writing these lines. For example, in a televised speech broadcast on Russian state television, Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, expressed himself as follows: "Order to the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the General Staff to put the deterrent forces of the Russian army on special combat alert" (Sârbu 2022). Later, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, issued a similar threat when he specified that "if a third world war were to occur, it would involve nuclear weapons and be destructive" (Stan 2022).

Analyzing these aspects, we cannot help but notice the conclusion that emerges almost automatically; that is, Russia feels threatened by possible deployments of NATO nuclear weapons in the vicinity of its borders only because it itself would use, in similar situations, the threat with the use of nuclear weapons.
Also, Russia's true interests may, in our opinion, be even more closely related to the security of the regime than to the security of the state. Thus, the threat that the Putin regime perceives as coming from the proliferation of the so-called "colorful revolutions" may be one of the main factors prompting the Kremlin to consider of particular importance the existence of states with a political orientation close to its own, both internally and externally, in the proximity of its borders. The existence of such states is seen by decision makers in Moscow as a barrier against possible contagion of a possible "colorful revolution" supported and influenced by Western powers.

We recall, at this stage, the statements of the theorist of international relations, Alexander Wendt. In this sense, he does not deny the claims of the "father" of the post-war theory of international relations, Hans Morgenthau, according to which states act using their elements of power to achieve their own interests (Morgenthau 2007, passim) but he nuanced them, stating that interests are not objective realities, empirically ascertainable, but socio-cultural constructs. The way a state perceives its interests varies according to the cultural background, ideal, etc., of its representatives, and may vary significantly, under the influence of historical events (Wendt 2011, passim).

This may be true in the case of Russia if we accept the possibility of an increased influence of Russian exceptionalism on the formation of the perception of the interests of the Russian state internationally.

The main components of the corpus of ideas that make up Russian exceptionalism can be identified as gravitating around Russia's imperial and messianic destiny. More precisely, it is about the fact that perceiving itself as the strongest international representative of the Christian religion of the Orthodox denomination[7] and, in the same vein, perpetuating the myth of the "Third Rome", Russia has over time articulated its own vision of international law. Regarding this vision[8], which almost invariably comes to support Russia's aggressive actions, it can be said that it shows certain similarities with Rabbi Maimonides' conception of natural law.

At this point, the natural law paradigm intervenes, which underpins what Russia has tried to apply over time. Thus, in the natural paradigm, the laws must be based on reason, and not be a result of frivolous actions from which an arbitrary character emerges. It also attributes the characteristic of rationality to the law of nations. Maimonides claims that, in the absence of rational laws and societal morality, it suffers (Jacobs 2012, passim). He based some of his natural law arguments on theological foundations. The first examples of references to natural law appear in the *Epistle to the Romans* of the Apostle Paul, most visibly in chapter 2 of the *Epistle*. From here will begin the works of Barnabas, the disciple of the Apostle Paul, Pope Clement I (Clement the Roman), Polycarp of Smyrna, Hermas – the brother of Pope Pius I – and Ignatius of Antioch, who will interweave natural law with morality and theology (Crowe 1977, 52-57). Attempts in this sense existed even before the writing of the *Epistle to the Romans*, by Philo of Alexandria, and some lines from the Gnostics will continue in parallel, such as Valentinus (2nd century AD) or Basilides (2nd century AD) (Crowe 1977, 52-58).

Irenaeus of Lyon (2nd-3rd centuries AD) will also continue along the lines of the morality of natural law, through theological visions. In the same timeframe, Clement of Alexandria will carry forward the attempts of Philo of Alexandria, about law and right reason, a concept that also appeared in Cicero. Tertullian identified natural law as a means of pacification, through the naturalist-egalitarian perspective, and discussed its theological dimension. Origen, the disciple of Clement of Alexandria, also inspired by the stoic Cleanthes of Assos, will also discuss the primacy of nature – implicitly natural law – over other laws (Ramelli 2009, passim; Crowe 1977, 52-62).

Another interesting point that Maimonides brings up is about the utilitarian character of laws – in the paradigm of natural law. He believed the generalities of a law constituted the utilitarian character, being formulated precisely for the fulfillment of such a purpose. On the other hand, the particularities of a law did not share the same utilitarian character, but rather a moralizing one. However, Maimonides did not consider that the particularities of

[7] See, in this sense, the role of protector of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire, most of them of the Orthodox rite, imposed on the latter by the treaties that followed the successive Russo-Turkish wars, starting with the one at Kuciuk-Kainarci, later the war between the years 1768-1774.

[8] Which, for this reason, we believe can only be considered a narrative with a legal appearance intended to give an acceptable form (internally and partially externally - among one's own allies, moreover an increasingly narrow circle -) to a policy which, in its essence, remains one of power.

a law should be studied from a causal point of view, these being rather inherent and individualized at the level of society. Thus, while the cause of generalities was represented by utilitarian reasons, particularities did not – in Maimonides' view – have a specific causal character. Moreover, the function of legislative regulations was to support social and political norms (Jacobs 2012, passim).

Maimonides – through the lens of his vision of natural law – raises some dilemmas on this issue. Thus, some opinions claim because of the dual nature of the law – the utilitarian and the moralizing – society can rather choose an antinomian type of direction, as a result of a perception of duplicity. From here can derive the idea that norming can have a dispensable character because, without utilitarianism and the moral dimension, it loses its original purpose.

In other words, Russia tried – and still does – to promote certain policies and ideas based on a moral foundation, of natural inspiration with accents of divine influence (Valliere and Poole 2022, passim). The entire panoply of phrases, leitmotifs, and creeds propagated by Moscow over time, through both direct and indirect means aimed at building a narrative that would support Russia's imperialist aspirations and goals. Whether it was about laws, wars, diplomatic actions, all these – and not only – came under a specific umbrella that tries to implement the suggestion that these things are nothing but a natural consequence of the rights that Russia, by its very existence, has had (Cucciolla 2019, passim). Contesting or questioning any of these premises, regardless of whether it was internal or external, triggered repressive actions that none of the regimes that came to power – be they imperialist, communist dictatorial, or illiberal authoritarian – felt some reluctance to apply. Of course, along the way the narrative underwent changes in order to be able to fit the temporal goals of the actors who represented the leadership (Laruelle 2019, passim).

However, the foundation remained the same – precisely because it was quite simplistic and malleable – namely that a natural right, divinely created, conferred immense prerogatives on Russia, something that the decadent West, and essentially any opponent of the regime from at that moment, they could not accept them for various reasons that often did nothing but feed an invisible enemy type theory (Hill and Cappelli 2010, passim). These messages found an echo not only on the internal level of Russia, from Moscow and Saint Petersburg to Siberia and Vladivostok, but also outside Russian space.

The narrative was taken over and was even adapted according to the needs of other actors who were, in one form or another, in the sphere of Russian influence. Russia encouraged, and even supported, this propagation precisely to induce, in the end, the ideas supported by pan-Slavism, and behind which there would have been nothing other than Russian domination for a large part of Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Suslov 2012, 575-595; Black 2019, passim). The natural paradigm, and its moral character, were very well connected to the nationalist and conservative

strands, insisting that it comes as a saving answer to the current ideologies which, in the paradigmatic opinion, have done nothing but contribute the majority to the current *status quo*, under the influence of various crises. Such a narrative worked very well for this segment of the population, and finally, for the electorate in Eastern Europe, in some cases even catching on in Western countries (Martinelli 2018, passim). But what this narrative lacks is exactly what it accuses others of not doing, namely the part of seeking and providing solutions. Apart from a speech intended to be mobilizing, this version of the narrative offers nothing but a wide spectrum of illusions.

In this sense, Russia opposes the positivist paradigm by putting the natural version of international law in contrast. What the positivist paradigm brings is exactly the rule of law which is established based on agreements at the community level, and by extension at the state level. In fact, it is Russia that is trying to exploit the area of law versus morality, arguing that many of the international norms are made with bad intentions, to the detriment of states that have other visions than those of the West (Samokhvalov 2017, passim). The entire foundation is concretized by Russia's wishes – expressed in a very visible way – to create a new paradigm at the world level. Of course, such a new order may have no other way than directed and directed by Moscow. Moreover, the propaganda apparatus strives to mask these things by painting an image in which the Russian state is oppressed and misunderstood by the decadent West (Schulze 2018, 57-85).

One of the ideas behind positive law was that a court of law does not apply rules in a general way, but rather applies a set of rules – in a particular way – which are agreed upon or, as the case may be, imposed – by the authorities in a community. On the other hand, the same voices believed that even in the situation where the particular set of rules/laws was applied by a court, this did not mean that the respective law – by applying it – could equate to the concept of justice; otherwise said, it was very likely that the application of a law could not meet the criterion of justice (MacCormick and Weinberger 1986, passim; Murphy 2005, 4-24). Even if a law could still equate to justice, it could not have equated to the rules of morality. While a moral norm defines, in general terms, the actions and characteristics of moral behavior, the law was obliged to exemplify and specify the conditions necessary for its observance. Finally, it was found that, without cooperation and harmonization of the conditions described, in a society, the criterion of interdependence – of the members of the society in relation to the individual – could not have been fulfilled, because the members of a society were based on a status quo which required the observance of some norms of moral-legal conduct (MacCormick and Weinberger 1986, passim; Murphy 2005, 10-19).

Therefore, a law belonging to positive law had to have a determining clarity, a specific character – leading from general definitions to particular examples – and, in this way, be able to ensure an appropriate norm of conduct at the level of society. Of course,

through these types of laws (including procedural elements), positive law maintains a close connection with the moral dimension. There is, therefore, the risk that in the case of a potential imbalance of the two areas – legal and moral – the positive right is sometimes characterized as being rather of an arbitrary value (Murphy 2005, 10-19; George 1996, passim).

This results in a duality of positive law, namely that on the one hand, in its perception – at a descriptive and empirical level – the law originates from a deliberate imposition, and therefore it is rather promulgated or postulated, without having an arbitrary character. On the other hand, at the normative level, positive law sometimes shows that, regarding content, a legal norm can be devoid of morality at an intrinsic level – or even at a universal level – or supported by a moralizing force; therefore, the character is arbitrary (Murphy 2005, passim).

This positivist view – of the primacy of sovereign authority – is best reflected in van Bynkershoek's ideas about war. It describes both individuals and state entities as in the form of independent actors, eliminating the specificity of war, be it public or private, and assuming a framework based on universality. Elaborating on the ideas of Hugo Grotius, van Bynkershoek saw war not as an action, but as a condition of the state – referring to sovereign authority. Also, war could only take place between state entities – or individuals, for that matter – that had no sovereign authority to control them; thus, only sovereign authority could trigger the condition of war. Van Bynkershoek's positivist perspective held that the outbreak of war could fulfill the entire legal framework, even when there was no formal declaration announcing the start of war – at this point contradicting the naturalistic ideas of Grotius, who had a much more restrictive view of the need for an official declaration of war (Ballis 1937, 137-138). But van Bynkershoek's view was supported by practicality: he provided several examples of wars that had started without official declarations, which were not framed as illegal due to the lack of declaration documents. On the other hand, van Bynkershoek argued that the absence of the condition of war can only be caused by the observance of rights and freedoms codified by laws and treaties – thus, again, showing the independence of the relationship from sovereign authority, societal order, and reason. Regarding the idea of neutrality, van Bynkershoek accepted it from a rather customary point of view, but which could be achieved in the absence of obligations – written in treaties – towards one of the belligerent parties, in conjunction with the lack of direct participation (Ballis 1937, passim).

Russia fits perfectly into the examples given by van Bynkershoek regarding the outbreak of wars without a prior declaration. Moreover, in the current case – the Ukrainian one – Russia goes even further and denies the fact that it is waging a war, and disguises everything under the idea of direct support of oppressed minorities; that is, the Russian population in the separatist republics. The same reason was used by Russia in 2014, and it was perpetuated in most of the conflicts after the 1990s in which it was involved (Friedman 2018, passim). This pretext manages, on the one

hand, to fit into the naturalistic paradigm, that of morality and the need to help one's neighbor, as well as to violate the principles of positive law regarding declarations of war and the justice and justification of the act of warfare. It is neither the first, nor the last time that Russia will resort to such means to support its actions, but it seems that these remnants of the naturalist bastion are starting to shake more and more (Laruelle 2019, passim).

Russia's perception of international relations – changing constancy or just constancy? From the "security perimeters" created after the Second World War to Vladimir Putin's Russia

Three times in the chronology of less than a century, Germany (Prussia) and France each considered that the achievement of their interests could be yielded through means that include armed confrontation. This led to the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), World War I and World War II[9].
After the Second World War, however, under the influence of the Soviet threat and American foreign policy orientations, both France and Germany realized that their interests were no longer centered on territorial expansion achieved by military means, but on the maintenance of peace and the achievement of socio-economic prosperity. This realization led to the replacement of confrontation with integration, giving birth to the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community. In roughly the same span, Russia came into conflict with virtually all of its neighbors (from the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires, to Iran, China, Japan, Germany again, Romania, Finland, Japan again, and China again, Afghanistan, Georgia or Ukraine, in the hope that no example has been omitted from this extensive enumeration) and continues to do so as we write these lines.

[9] Of course, the causes of the last two are more complex, but both involve, among the main episodes, the Franco-German confrontation.

Therefore, a change of perception at the level of leadership of the two states determined a similar change in the matter of representing the national interest. In Russia, however, such a change in perception, at least a lasting one, has never occurred. As we have demonstrated in a previous approach (Bantaș and Bălănică 2013, 105-119) and as numerous other doctrinaires have shown, Russia's geopolitics has remained, in its fundamental lines, the same from the 15th century, from Ivan III to the present day. This kind of geopolitics was based on several fundamental coordinates, such as Russia's need to get out of a perceived strategic encirclement by maritime civilizations, the need to secure access to warm seas, and the need to create successive "security perimeters" from neighboring states, to protect the center of Russian imperial power.

The problem with this trend is that we do not know where it stops and if it ever stops. By creating a security perimeter around the imperial center (of Russia

in today's borders, for example), a perimeter consisting of ex-Soviet states (such as Ukraine), Russia can be considered to have achieved its own security aspirations. But what prevents Russia, after some time, from considering that Ukraine and Belarus, through their connections with the Russian state,[10] have become part of the imperial center and, therefore, a new security perimeter is needed to protect them, formed by states such as Romania, Poland, etc.?

[10] Of which the followers of the Putinist Eurasianism are convinced, also justifying the disappearance of their statehood and their dissolution in the Russian state, as explained by Vladimir Putin himself in the speech that preceded the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics.

Incidentally, history reminds us that this happened during the Second World War, at the end of which the whole of Eastern Europe came to be occupied by the Red Army. After this occupation, the USSR was not satisfied with the security perimeter created but began to pressure Turkey for territorial concessions regarding the regime of the Straits (which precipitated the integration of Greece and Turkey into NATO) and even claimed rights related to the former Italian colony of Libya.

Also, if the interests of the Putin regime are more related to the creation of a protective barrier against „color revolutions", then it seems unlikely to us that they will undergo any review process in the foreseeable future since such a process would mean that the said regime no longer regards its own survival as its primary interest, which goes against not only the conclusions of analyzes of the past behavior of Russia and its regimes, internally and externally, but also human nature itself. In the absence of internal control mechanisms that can limit or restrict the possibility of a regime to perpetuate its exercise of power, the regime in question will not hesitate to consider this perpetuation as its main interest; or, as far as Russia is concerned, we do not notice the existence of any such constitutional, political, or social constraints. Therefore, we cannot foresee the basis for future cooperation between Russia and the states that it sees as potential targets. Moreover, such a basis can only be achieved starting from a gradual integration process, concomitantly with economic and political developments at the national and international level (Salomia and Mihalache 2016, 166), following the example offered by the European Union, which proves that links that go beyond the limits of nation-states, taking into account voluntary adhesion and peaceful transformation (Dumitraşcu 2006, 174) are the most sustainable.

Conclusions: What to do?

Essentially, what we are asserting is that Russia perceives its state and security interests in a deeply flawed way that is motivated not by empirical reality, but by its self-induced conviction of its own imperial destiny. In this vein, we reiterate the fact that the security of a state cannot be sought by affecting the security of another state, by interfering with its right to conclude international agreements that, based on the principle of sovereign equality of states, it

wishes to conclude or, even more so, by denying the right to exist of a state based on biased historical arguments. If relations between states were based on historical arguments, the world would be a theater of perpetual war, as each state can choose a favorite period in history to which it wishes to return, a period that would certainly be incompatible with the expectations of another state.

The only durable basis on which relations between states can rest is international law, whose fundamental norms and principles include the prohibition of the use of force and the threat of force. Until Russia understands this, it will only be a perpetual threat to the security of the entire world and, therefore, the entire world is forced to respond to this threat by isolating and impoverishing Russia at all costs, so that it realizes, through a shock similar to those suffered by Germany and Japan at the end of the Second World War, that the war of aggression is not and cannot be a tool to achieve the goals of states.

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