Relac. int. v4nse Buenos Aires May/Nov. 2008

# A Latin American Reading of the Classical Concepts of International Relations Theory

**Nicolás Falomir Lockhart**
Candidate for the Master's Degree in International Relations at the Institute for International Relations of the National University of La Plata

'…from the point of view of the functioning of the
International regime, there is no theory as yet that,
on the one hand, constitutes a reliable
approach to the present reality and,
on the other, can efficiently serve
the prescriptive goals of
small and medium-sized states… '
Juan Carlos Puig, 1984

## I. Introduction

When studying international phenomena from a Latin American standpoint, we often find the classical concepts of international relations theory to be inadequate for our interpretive needs to a certain extent. The fact that those concepts were conceived in the context of developed societies carries two significant consequences: On the one hand, there are limitations in the applicability of those theoretical tools when faced with the task of identifying and interpreting international phenomena in this region. On the other hand, they are of very little use when plotting a future course of action.

For that reason, this paper aims at drawing attention to the need to engage in a critical reading of such concepts—a reading from *our* standpoint, and in accordance with the realities we face. The first part of this paper will offer an account of why there is a need for a *Latin American approach*, and will then proceed to offer a critique of classical concepts we consider useful, such as the notion of international system (with special emphasis on the inequalities between states and the international permissiveness that would make the

implementation of autonomist policies possible), the understanding of power as a multifaceted phenomenon (which we understand to be the most convenient view for Latin America), the idea of cooperation and the fields in which it takes place, and, finally, the importance of ideas and the influence they exert through the cultural variable. The paper ends with a brief personal conclusion on the basis of the preceding analysis, which maintains that a Latin American approach can only be realized by selecting and possibly redefining useful concepts, as well as by employing theoretical products of one's own, as in the case of autonomist proposals.

## II. Why do Classical Concepts Feel Foreign to us? — The Importance of a Theory of One's Own

The dominant theories in International Relations make up bodies of postulates conceived and developed in a particular—western, developed—context. For this reason, applying those theories outside their originating context necessarily entails making a distorted reading of that other reality. A consequence of that *misreading* is that actors will behave in accordance with that *'meconnaissance.'*[1]

Juan Carlos Puig, in his appeal for a 'de-ideologization' of the International Relations discipline, claims that 'we must recognize that the people whose decisions determine the policies and actions of nations do not respond to the objective facts of the situation. It is what we think the world is, rather than what it actually is, that determines our behavior' (1984, p. 36).

Observing the world from one's own standpoint and with conceptual tools of one's own—instead of using theories conceived, applied, and legitimized in central countries—is not a privilege peripheral countries can afford to forfeit. If, as Stephanie Neuman holds, theory is the the lens through which the world is perceived and thus the cast that shapes one's actions in the international arena (1998, p. 16), we should advocate and or create concepts that point in the direction of the actions we need to take to operate in our context.[2]

Elaborating and employing concepts of one's own is no minor matter. If words are the basis of thought—if our thinking is dependent on the possibility of expressing thoughts by means of words, concepts, and terms—we can't be indifferent when choosing to talk about the *anarchy of the international system* or about an international system that shows clears signs of verticality (Puig calls this a *hierarchical regime*).[3] Especially when our region is in the lower end of that hierarchical order. The significance of this enterprise lies in the possibility of understanding the world from our standpoint, in a way that is aligned with interests and needs, rather than using theories conceived to fit the needs of others. It is worth mentioning that there is

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[1] We choose to use the French term because it refers to more than a simple 'misunderstanding.' '*Meconnaissance*' means being unable to understand something in the sense of being unable to see its qualities, being unable to appreciate their real value. Larousse Illustré: 1984.

[2] The author agrees with Kratochwil in saying that 'concepts we use for practical matters are more like signals for action than labels for things' (1999, p. 607).

[3] 'Why not just admit that the international "system" is a hierarchical regime?' Juan Carlos Puig, 'La Política Exterior Argentina: incongruencia epidérmica y coherencia estructural' in *América Latina: políticas exteriores comparadas*; Buenos Aires, Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1984, p. 50.

no way around this situation; 'Everyone uses theories—whether he or she knows it or not—and disagreements about policy usually rest on more fundamental disagreements about the basic forces that shape international outcomes" (Walt, 1998, p. 29). Since that is the case, we must at least know the implications of using foreign theoretical constructs.

Robert W. Cox describes the same problem when he makes the distinction between Problem-Solving Theory and Critical Theory: '[since] the initial perspective [the axiological content of a theory, which makes it work in someone's interest and functional to their goals] is always contained within a theory, (...) there is no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from a standpoint in time and space' (1981, p. 150). Indeed, any initial theory must be adjusted as reality itself changes. There is, therefore, a dialogue of sorts between the theory and the evolving reality, which ultimately leads to the following alternative: either the theory becomes a guide to the resolution of problems raised by the changes effected from the 'initial perspective,' or it leads to Critical Theory. In this latter case, it diverges from the prevailing order and asks how that order came to be. Critical Theory questions the roots of social and power relations, and contemplates the possibility of change.

Along the same lines, it is important to remind ourselves, as Waltz does, that the problem with these theories is not that they parcel out reality, since all theories—by definition—require that we do so.[4] The problem is, as Waltz himself explains, whether the selection of those segments of reality, that isolation, proves useful to the explanatory and predictive purposes of the theory in question. In this way, what this paper is intended to do—in Cox's terms—is to denounce the consequences of applying existing theories (and their 'initial perspectives' defined in a particular time and space) and to highlight the need to generate a point of view of one's own that is capable of questioning the preexisting order and the possibility of effecting changes in accordance with one's problems and interests.

Far from attempting to create a new theory, which would be excessively ambitious for the present paper, our aim is simply to offer a critical analysis of certain concepts and terms in order to redefine them,[5] with a view to improving them[6] in the sense of making them more useful for our own analyses. We will strive to do this by means of the identification of 'words'—concepts or ideas—that, while complementing

[4] 'Theory isolates a realm in order to deal with it intellectually. Isolating a realm is a precondition for the development of a theory that can explain what happens within it.' (Waltz, 1988, p.19).

[5] Kratochwil points out the inconvenience, natural to any discipline that does not use a formal language, of having basic concepts that are essentially open to debate (1999, p. 592). Indeed, it is easy for any student who approaches texts about IR Theory for the first time to realize that different authors belonging to different schools use the same terms to mean different things. This translates into a certain degree of uncertainty and in the need to deduce the meaning that each author gives to each term.

[6] The task of studying terms in order to grasp their exact meaning so as to to evaluate their usefulness (in our case, regarding the possibility of applying them to the Latin American reality) is not at all novel. In fact, delimiting the meaning of the terms used by different authors, even those belonging to the same school, proves to be a very common practice and is rarely superfluous. Regardless, the discussion at hand does not revolve around the academic precision of the way classical IR concepts are employed, but rather around the usefulness of those concepts when applied to Latin America.

the main theories, can lead to a Latin American analysis, on the basis of theories originated in central countries[7].

## III. Critical Reading of Classical Concepts

In order to accomplish the objectives of this paper, we must first determine which concepts will undergo examination as part of our critical reading. This is decided based on the degree of usefulness of said concepts for a Latin American reading of our realities and needs. Thus, we will take some postulates of neorealism[8] as our point of departure. To be more precise, we will analyze some assumptions in Waltz's structural realism,[9] such as those that deal with the logic of power, national interests, and the international system. We consider the realist approach especially useful for an understanding of power relations. Also, we believe that several of these postulates could be considered epistemological postulates of international relations as a whole.

The adoption of structural realism[10] as a point of departure, however, does not at all mean that we subscribe to that school while rejecting all others. Indeed, if the criterion by which theories are to be judged is usefulness, then we must use other concepts according to the advantages they have to offer in our attempt at reading our Latin American reality critically. In this respect, we can't help mentioning here the usefulness that we will find in concepts taken from neoliberalism and constructivism for our 'Latin American approach.'

Furthermore, we will also examine the concept of 'interdependence,' which arose from neoliberalism, or institutional liberalism. In terms of usefulness, we believe that this concept can account for certain phenomena that are not contemplated by (neo)realism. Namely, situations in which international

[7] Miranda highlights the will to improvement inherent in those approaches that pursued a reinterpretation of the concepts of periphery and autonomy in Argentina: 'these approaches sought something different, not so much in their analysis as in what they proposed.' Roberto Miranda, 'Sobre los fundamentos internacionales de la política argentina: teoría y realidad', 2005, p. 57.

[8] We choose structural realism instead of classical realism precisely because of the emphasis that it places on the international system above the state. According to Mearsheimer (1995), the basic postulates of Realism can be summarized in five points: 1) The international system is anarchical, but not chaotic, despite the fact that there is no central authority above all states. 2) States hold maximum power at the international level—'sovereignty'—but there are differences in their (military) capabilities, which makes each state dangerous to others. The omnipresence of power (of each state) is a key concept. 3) States can never be certain of the intentions of other states, which impedes lasting cooperation between them. 4) The ultimate goal of a state is ensuring its own survival. 5) States act rationally and strategically in order to protect their interests. Consequently, states enter into relations of competition, resulting in a balance of power.

[9] Specialized bibliography tends to agree in acknowledging Kenneth Waltz as the person responsible for updating realism just at the moment when the voices that criticized it were the loudest (see Macleod and O'Meara 2007, p. 66; Salomón Gonzalez, 2002, p. 8; Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1993, p. 131).

[10] While we acknowledge the soundness of neorealism to explain power relations, we must distance ourselves from the pessimistic philosophical orientation inherent in this theory, because—as Mearsheimer has mentioned—for realism, the international system is a brutal arena where states look for opportunities to take advantage of each other and all can be reduced to a quest for power (Mearsheimer, 1995, p. 9).

organizations, NGOs, or transnational corporations operate internationally—situations that escape the classical logic of power on which 'realist' explanations are based. Therein lies the advantage of the complementarity between neoliberalism and neorealism.[11]

Last, we will employ the constructivist strategy of using ideas as tools for the interpretation of international phenomena. We concur with Wendt in saying that neorealists and neoliberalists coincide in maintaining that 'power,' 'national interest' and 'international institutions' can explain most international events (even though there is no agreement on the weight assigned to each notion), but they disregard such variables as ideas, beliefs, perceptions, and values—all of which appear to be too important to be simply left aside.

### III. a) The International System Concept

For realism, the international system is anarchical: no authority exists above states, who, as equals, hold the maximum power in the international stage: sovereignty. The absence of a 'government of governments' (Mearsheiner, 1995, p. 10) forces states to be on a permanent quest for security and the fulfilment of their interests, which is why the rarely cooperate unless doing so in a particular situation leads to 'relative gains.' This definition of the international system shows how the adoption of a concept entails the adoption of a stance and how it conditions international action.

Moreover, this definition takes for granted the idea that states are equal (sovereign) and that the relationship between them is horizontal, that they are peers and therefore in competition—where each state can only count on its own capabilities and must protect itself from any possible attacks from the others. Raymond Aron himself (1968, p. 8) confirms as much when he defines international relations as a discipline that '... deals with relations between political units, each of which claims the right to take justice into its own hands and to be the sole arbiter of the decision to fight or not to fight.'

Juan Carlos Puig summarizes these realist postulates in what he called 'the mirage of the atomistic conception of the international community' and points out that: '...unfortunately, small and medium-sized states still operate in the international arena on the basis of the misrepresentation of the (international) regime—a representation that, at bottom continues to operate on foundations that were valid in the 19th century, but which, as has been systematically observed, do not match the current reality of the world' (1984, p. 20). That is the reason for his appeal to—in the first place—'de-ideologize' the science of international relations to do away with categories created in the 19th century[12] which continue to have a 'distorting

[11] Strictly speaking, the idea of a neo-neo synthesis is not a new idea. On the contrary, both Keohane and Nye admit in *Power and Interdependence* that they did not intend to build a new paradigm, but rather to complete realism with the interdependence approach (1988).

[12] These logical categories were based on the need to legitimize the existing relations between European states, who represented civilized nations, and other states, whose sovereignty was not recognized by reason of their being considered savages and barbarians.

influence' that works to the advantage of central powers and in detriment of peripheral countries, and—secondly—'create categories of our own for the construal of the phenomena that it studies' (1984, p. 29).

Similarly, Neuman holds that the conception of the international system as a stage where sovereign States are free to play can hardly apply to peripheral countries, 'who perceive the international system to be ordered and regulated by the few Great Powers in it' (1998, p. 4). Indeed, Latin American history can offer abundant examples of situations in which states make decisions that go against their own interests but are in alignment with the interests of another state. Such decisions have often been imposed on them as if the states in the region were in a relation of subordination to central states.

Such being the case, we can readily claim that a critical Latin American reading of the concept of international system must include the idea of a certain hierarchy and of an order based on the power relations between powerful states and powerless or weak states, despite the fact that no 'government of governments' exists in formal terms.

Admittedly, since Waltz's 'reformulation' (Salomón Gonzalez, 2002, p. 11), the idea of anarchy has been combined with the idea of 'structure,' and according to its configuration, the latter idea determines the types and forms of relationship between states that are possible within it. Thus, relationships in a bipolar structure will be different from the relationships in a multipolar structure. However, we must concur once again with Puig, who in his analysis of Waltz's revision, sees a contradiction between the idea that there is an anarchical structure and the claim that states will 'become unequal' depending on their differing capabilities (1984, p. 49). It would be the same to claim that the international system is organized according to the capabilities of states and that, consequently, there is an executive board of sorts running the world.

Regarding the thesis that all states (or political units, in Aron's terms) are equal and sovereign, it needs to be mentioned that reality has demonstrated once and again that such an assumption is disproved on a daily basis. As way of an example, we need look no further than the fact that the 'war on terror' has established itself in the international agenda of Latin American countries despite the fact that this is a region characterized by the fact that is at peace.[13] This is a clear example of how some countries decide (according to their own interests) the course of international relations as a whole. Were it not for that 'influence,' Latin America would focus more of its efforts on solving the problems of social inclusion and economic development instead of the war against terrorism.

All of the above forces us to conclude that states interact in *hierarchical international system* that is ordered according to criteria imposed by the most powerful states. The development of this idea of a world

[13] In a communication during the First South American Summit of Heads of State, held in Brasília in 2000, the governments ratified their goal of consolidating the 'South American Peace Zone.' We choose this event, though not the first in its kind, is significant by reason of the number of participating states. It is proof of South America's status as a peaceful region—South Latin America, in particular, has been able to resolve all potential conflicts or at least been able to carry them to a peaceful solution in all cases.

ordered by the interests of the most powerful states is based on the premise that not all states are equal, because there are a few states who make impositions and other states who suffer those impositions.[14]

Samir Amin offers an explanation (that we find useful as well) for the existence of powerful states with the ability to determine the course of international relations, within the frame of the current globalization, on the basis of the following premise: 'the position of a country in the world pyramid is determined by the capability of its products to compete in the world market. (...) Such competitiveness is the complex result of a series of conditions that operate on the economic, political and social reality and that, in this unequal combat, centers use '**five monopolies**' that bolster their actions effectively' (Amin, 1997, pp. 97-98).

The five monopolies Amir mentions are:

1. Monopoly of the technological field: areas that demand enormous expenditures, such that only a rich and powerful state can afford.
2. Monopoly of control over the flow of capitals or global finances: until recently, a nation's savings could only circulate in a limited space, but that is no longer the case. Savings are now centralized by the intervention of financial institutions who are free to operate all over the world.
3. Monopoly fo access to natural resources.
4. Monopoly of communications and the media, which are a powerful tool for the manipulation of public opinion.
5. Monopoly of weapons of mass destruction.

Amin concludes by explaining that: 'Taken together, these five monopolies are the framework in which the law of value manifests itself. Far from expressing pure economic rationality, (...) it is the condensed expression of these determinants. Such determinants nullify the scope of industrialization in the periphery and lower the value of the productive labor that goes into those products, while simultaneously overvaluing, to the advantage of centers, the supposed added value of the activities by which the new monopolies operate' (Amin, 1997, p. 99).

All of this necessarily brings the definition of 'sovereignty' into question. In its classical sense, it refers to the set of faculties a state possesses and can exercise free from the influence of any other state. However, not all states have that degree of independence: if a state, for whatever reason, is in a position to force its will on another, then the latter has no independence to speak of. Nevertheless, we do not believe this

[14] Puig mentions the hierarchical international order when explaining that it is a political regime and that, as such, it has a command structure of sorts. He explains that there are criteria for determining who can command whom. Some of those criteria are accepted while others are not. The few at the top are powerful states who can impose their will on others, then, in an intermediate position, there are those who reproduce the criteria imposed from above, but hold a certain degree of power that allows them to make their own demands, and at the bottom we find the people in the different States who are affected by all those above them, and can therefore do no more than follow the agenda they impose (Puig, 1984, p. 50).

is a concept that should be discarded. On the contrary, we must reclaim this 'legal fiction' that calls for equality between states and see it as a goal to aspire to in every foreign policy act.

The position occupied in the law by the idea of sovereignty was occupied in the international relations theory of this region by the idea of 'autonomy.' As mentioned above, not all states are equals—there are states whose foreign policy does not reflect their national interests so much as it does the influence of the interests of more powerful states. This inability to make decisions on their own can be explained by means of the concept of 'autonomy.' This term finds its origin in the will to grow out of the peripheral status.[15] The theory of autonomy starts from the idea that the status of being a peripheral country—characterized by economic and social underdevelopment—is not inescapable; it can be overcome by working along two axes: economic development and social development.[16]

In Puig's words: 'Autonomizing means broadening one's margin of choice and, consequently, usually entails a reduction in someone else's margin of choice...' (1980:44). The definition put forward by Puig is similar to 'zero-sum' or 'relative gains' power relations, in which one party's winnings are another's losses.

Jaguaribe, in turn, completes the idea by highlighting the fact that autonomist policies involve the making of a resolution: to overcome underdevelopment, leave the periphery (2000, p. 26). In Jaguaribe's vision, autonomist policies take advantage of and expand the degree of *international permissiveness* (Puig, 1980, p. 140), where permissiveness refers to the margin of maneuverability that some non-developed—those that are viable (Jaguaribe, 1972, p. 154)—have in order to exercise their autonomy and move along the road to development.[17]

In conclusion, from a Latin American point of view, we must admit that the international system is not made up of equal units in a horizontal relationship, but rather of developed states and peripheral or underdeveloped states, whose power to decide is curtailed to the advantage of the former. Nevertheless, the peripheral status of developing states is not a necessity—it is possible to overcome it. Adopting this view of the international system is the first step towards no longer reproducing an order that is contrary to our own interests.

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[15] In suggesting this, we follow Helio Jaguaribe and Juan Carlos Puig, who have gone to great lengths to show the possibilities of autonomy for peripheral states, thanks to what the former terms 'international permissiveness.' Puig, in turn, criticizes dependency theory for having become a conscience-soothing explanation of sorts that dilutes responsibility. He reduces it to the term 'externalism,' which would be nothing more than a way of escaping from our responsibilities.

[16] Jaguaribe explains Argentina's need for Brazilian cooperation in order to attain economic development and Brazil's need for Argentine cooperation in order to attain social development (Jaguaribe, 2004, p. 7).

[17] While not disapproving of the 'humble option' adopted by Chile, a small country with a civilized people and considerable productive capabilities, Jaguaribe wonders if 'a Danish destiny is conceivable for Argentina or Brazil'. He goes as far as saying that Chile has the option of either joining the FTAA and becoming Denmark, or joining Mercosur and becoming Sweden. Being Sweden means having the a certain degree of autonomy, being more than a simple province of the world, a mere segment of the international market. (Ferrer and Jaguaribe 2001, p. 89).

**III. b) The concept of power**

In the above section, we argued that in order to develop an approach of our own to international phenomena, we must acknowledge the fact that the international system has a *hierarchical structure* and that *not all states are equal*. In the following paragraphs, we will explain the need for a redefinition of another essential notion—that of 'power.'

Once again, our point of departure will be the realist approach, which maintains that power can be measured in terms of military strength.[18] However, power is more than the comparison of brute force; there is more to it than 'raw power.' Different authors identify less evident—though no less effective—'powers,' such as bargaining power, technological power, cultural power and sometimes make a distinction between power itself and the way it is perceived.

As mentioned above, Samir Amin identifies at least five manifestations of power that make it possible for developed countries to force their will on others. Of the five monopolies he mentions, only the last one (the possession of nuclear weapons) involve military power.

The notion of power that we will find useful in our Latin American analysis defines it as a complex phenomenon that goes far beyond military power.[19] Admittedly, this notion of power is not new either, since it has been explained by different authors from different schools. An example of power as an essentially complex phenomenon is offered by John S. Odell in his study of the results of the negotiations between the United States and the European Union (EU), on the one hand, and the United States and Brazil, on the other (Odell, 1993). Contrary to what might have been expected, his analysis proves that Brazil, despite being a weaker country (in traditional terms), managed to obtain better results than the EU when negotiating technology with a world-class military superpower. He reaches the conclusion that there are other types of power apart form the military kind, and that the latter can prove to be of little use in certain areas.

Along the same argumentative lines, another good example is one put forward by Wendt when referring to the relationship between Canada and the United States, two powers who have no conflicts between them. For that reason, the fact that the United States is the most powerful country in the world in military terms is irrelevant when bargaining with its neighbor on such matters as the supply of timber, oil, and gas (Wendt, 1999, p. 109).

Puig criticizes the traditional notion of power and denounces it as one of the presuppositions of the *'international mirage.'* He explains that the so called 'conception of power based on material forces' reflects the nineteenth-century configuration of the world, in which states are sovereign and equal, which from our standpoint can only be entertained as a idyllic belief (1984, p.33).

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[18] See Mearsheimer's summary of the basic notions of realism.

[19] Some authors have already pointed out the uselessness of military might when it grows to the point where it is possible not only to defeat, but also to eliminate the enemy and even oneself. On that subject, it is worthwhile to cite Puig, who explains that the 'possession of mass destruction potential' is a condition in the command hierarchy that carries with it moral and political costs so high that using that potential proves to be politically fruitless (Puig, 1984, p. 64).

It is fitting to clarify at this point that the multifaceted notion of power that we advance is to a considerable extent a vindication of the role of the state. Indeed, independently of the appearance of new international actors—such as those of subnational and supranational origin, or those of a transnational nature—the State continues to be the political manifestation of society, a representative of an identity, a culture with its values, its history, and its project as a nation.[20] This is the reason for the fact that the state continues to be a useful and necessary element for any understanding of international relations—especially at the present time, when the notion of 'frontier'[21] appears to be open for debate and the separation between internal and international politics is claimed by some to be fictitious.[22]

This vindication of the State and the multifaceted conception of power are compatible with the idea that underdeveloped countries can grow out of that stage as long as they decide to adopt autonomist policies in order to develop on the social and economic levels. In other words, underdeveloped states can escape that status as long as they build up *power* (as we have defined it in the previous paragraphs) by carrying out policies that tend to increase the degree of international permissiveness.

As regards Argentina in particular, we believe that power can be built, for example, by means of technological development. Historically, Argentina has always been a learned society and has had highly qualified human resources in some areas, such as nuclear energy (a field in which it can compete with first rate companies in the construction and sale of nuclear reactors),[23] biotechnology and genetic engineering.[24]

[20] While this is not the place to offer an extensive analysis of the topic, we can say that the proof of the importance that the state continues to have can be seen in the case of stateless nations. Is such cases, one of the priorities of those nations is precisely the quest for independence and the formation of a state of their own. This is the situation facing the Palestinian, Basque, and Kurdish peoples, to name but a few. One of the reasons for this is that the state continues to be an entity that ties together the various sectors of a society and makes its political organization possible in order to pursue its national project.

[21] James Rosenau has remarked on the porosity of state boundaries, which are no longer the frontier that separates the internal from the international, but have rather become a meeting point between the two. He also maintains that it is necessary to look at this phenomenon from a new perspective on international politics (1997).

[22] Various authors have gone to great lengths to prove the interconnection between the two fields, which are completely separate in traditional theory. So much so, in fact, that it is possible nowadays to find authors like Marcelo Lasagna, who advance models of the influence of political regime change on the foreign policy of a country (2005, p. 387); or Robert Putnam, who created a model for the analysis of the decision-making process based on two fields of negotiation: the international level (or Level I) and the internal level (or Level II), where such variables as the degree of institutionalization, the strategies adopted, and the existence of alliances come into play, and where all agreements reached on the first level must be ratified (1988, p. 427). Another author that needs to be mentioned here is Andrew Hurrell, who provides the example of the influence of international politics on the internal politics of Germany and the rest of West Europe after World War II (2003, p. 29).

[23] We can mention the experimental rocket Tronador I, which was recently tested in Bahía Blanca to great success, as proof of the aerospace capabilities of Argentina, which allegedly exist since the times of the projects named Cóndor I and Cóndor II during the 1980s.

[24] As for genetic engineering, we must not forget the fact that Argentina is one of six countries around the world that are ready to carry out genetic engineering projects on complex organisms. One such project was the cow called 'Pampita' and its five clones.

Another way of increasing one's international margin of maneuverability is having an intelligent natural resources policy.[25] Our country, privileged in activities related to land exploitation, has the upper hand in certain negotiations. The same goes for Chile with copper, and Venezuela with oil. Administering these resources in a way that furthers national development and the expansion of the country's margin of maneuverability means building up power for the country and improving its chances of adopting autonomist policies.

Power also manifests itself culturally. This is apparent in the influence civil society can exert on its government and, through it, on other governments. Examples of this can be seen on the influence that U.S. public opinion had on the Vietnam conflict and in the influence European societies have on their governments' agendas. This may be the most difficult kind of power to build up, as it requires social inclusion, instruction, and relatively stable bonds of solidarity. Nevertheless, it is one of the most influential manifestations of power, as evident to anyone who realizes the weight of the identity and religion factors in the Arab-Israeli conflict, or in Islamic extremism. Any analysis that overlooks this factor will be, at best, incomplete.[26]

The efficiency and weight of cultural power is also evinced by the way in which the values upheld by U.S. society in general have spread over the world thanks to globalization, making things easier for the hegemon: critical approaches have referred to this situation by such names as '*pensée unique*' and '*McDonaldization*'. Atilio Borón (1999, p. 219) holds that the globalization process is not a universalization of products from all countries, but rather a type of economic and cultural expansion of the the central western countries—particularly of United States economy and cultural values. Had it been a real universalization, every country would act on the world stage according to its capabilities. This does not happen, however. Borón illustrates this distortion by pointing to the film industry: if globalization really meant universalization, Indian films would be as common as American ones[27] in the international market—if not more common, as India is the number one producer of films in the world. This type of globalization and *'pensée unique'* is the most subtle of all means of domination: the cultural kind, as it nullifies the audience's critical attitude and ability to think about other, better possibilities.

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[25] Natural resources are a matter a vital importance, according to Aldo Ferrer, who suggests that development can be reached by creating an economy that can run on its own resources. The author summarizes his thought in the slogan: 'living on what we own' (Ferrer, 2001).

[26] Though not a constructivist, Jaguaribe provides a good example of this in 'Terrorismo e Islam', where he includes the cultural-religious variable in his model of analysis as a relevant fact for an analysis of the international context in which 9/11 and the Invasion of Iraq took place: '...Islamic terrorism can be distinguished from other types for being a religious super-radicalism which must be analyzed from the perspective of sociology and the history of religions' (2001, p. 126).

[27] This piece of information was taken from a lecture given by Atilio Borón at the Faculty of Juridical and Social Sciences of the National University of La Plata in the year 2000, entitled 'The Globalization Process and Latin America.'

By including more variables, we can broaden our understanding[28] and consequently our ability to build up power.[29] For that reason, Argentina become aware of the fact that it (still) has relative advantages in certain areas, which can provide an opportunities to reverse its current underdevelopment. Let us repeat that our country is in a position of relative advantage in areas such as science and technology, biotechnology, nuclear technology, food and energy production, the exploitation of natural resources, the use of marine resources, and the cultural plane (particularly in its regional aspect).

**III. c) The concept of interdepence**

The fact that the use of force can hardly produce favourable results in a commercial negotiation between two countries that coexist peacefully[30] is a clear signal that we need to adopt a multifaceted conception of power. That is to say, we must be able to conceive of the possibility that a country's power may be unequally developed, and thus strong in some areas while weak in others. This is the most convenient interpretation of 'power' for countries that have relative advantages in areas other than military force, because it is through those other means that they will be able to put their margin of maneuverability to good use.

If this is correct, Keohane's concept of interdependence proves to be particularly useful for an analysis of economic bargaining situations or low politics matters in general (1993, p. 24), which go beyond the scope of the logic of 'raw' power. According to this author, societies (understood as the synthesis of interstate, transgovernmental, and transnational relations), are interconnected by means of various channels which deal with a multiplicity of issues in a non-hierarchical agenda. That space can become a source for the construction of power due to the fact that this interdepence is *asymmetrical:*[31] 'Less dependent actors can often use the interdependent relationship as a source of power in bargaining over an issue and perhaps to affect other issues' (1993, p. 25).

Other concepts of neoliberalism that we can apply to our critical reading are *cooperation*, *international institutions* and *international regimes*. Indeed, we believe those concepts both enable us to see the world order as something that is essentially modifiable—rather than an unchanging reality to which we must resign ourselves—and simultaneously provide us with the means through which change can be enacted.

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[28] The rise in power involves a increase in 'low politics' issues, such as discussions on such topics as 'energy security' and 'food security'.

[29] We would like to highlight he capabilities of Mercosur as a food (and energy) producer for the world at a time when the United Nations have put the problem of rising food prices around the world in the Global Agenda.

[30] The example offered by Wendt (1999, p. 106) regarding the relations between the United States and Canada becomes relevant again at this point: the use of force in negotiations between the two would prove fruitless.

[31] The theory of interdependence as a source of power is much more complex than that. The author offers an analysis in two dimensions: **sensitivity** (the degree of responsiveness within a policy framework) and **vulnerability** (relative availability and costliness of alternatives that various actors face). Returning once again to the relations between the U.S. and Canada, we could say that Canadians can take advantage of their position in such economic matters as gas as oil exports to the United States, because the latter is vulnerable in these areas due to its need to import those resources.

In opposition to realism, this approach rejects the idea that the world is in constant conflict. States spend much more time cooperating than making war. While cooperative relationships do tend to reproduce power relationships (as explained by complex interdependence), there is no reason why there cannot be relationships in which Latin American states have a greater degree of relative power.[32] Therefore, the notion of cooperation presents itself as a useful tool for the understanding of international relations from the standpoint of a country that is not noted for its military might (see Keohane, 1993).

Moreover, we must highlight the role of international institutions in the international relations arena. A good deal of the topics on the international agenda are established by such institutions, which act as catalysts for the formation of coalitions—particularly important for our cause when it comes to linkages between weak states—and also act as a stage for negotiations and proposals.[33] In that sense, Latin American states can approach multilateral instances as an arena in which to build up power by, for example, carrying out agreed proposals or adopting common positions in international regimes.

In summary, the multifaceted conception of power opens up various ways of building up power. This makes the inclusion of such concepts as guides to our analysis of international relations a forced move for us if we are to understand our needs and think about our actions in a way that will enable us to obtain greater relative gains in our relations with central states.

### III. d) The value of ideas

Without going so far as to reduce everything to mere ideas, as the adoption of an extreme constructivist position would entail,[34] we believe it is convenient to vindicate cultural variables as tools for the analysis of international phenomena. Matters of national identity, cultural values, and religion are very frequently key problems in such phenomena as international conflicts, the so-called war on terror, independentist processes, Islamic integrationism, or Islamic extremism, to name but a few. Not taking such variables into account means deliberately risking an incomplete analysis.

Joel Larus, cited by Neuman, offers a good example of the importance of cultural factors: he asks why India failed to become a naval power despite meeting all the necessary material requirements. The answer lies in a cultural phenomenon: the importance of the the complex Hindu religio-caste system in India's military behavior (1998, p. 5).

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[32] At the risk of appearing repetitive, we need to mention once again the potentiality of Latin America for the production of food, and energy, as well as Argentina's competence in matters of nuclear energy and biotechnology.

[33] Jervis, in his explanation of what he considers to be the true point of contention between realists and neoliberal-institutionalists, points out that both sides admit that international institutions have 'a life of their own', but each school holds a different view of the influence such institutions can have on the expansion of the possibilities for cooperation (1999, p. 54).

[34] Walt, in his description of the constructivist approach, explains that, in an extreme version of the theory, all phenomena, including those one would normally characterize as material (such as economic interests) are, at the end of the day, ideas (1998, p. 31).

As regards the Latin American subsystem, we can highlight the importance for regional integration of such factors as a colonial history and (in the case of Spanish speakers) a common language, the essentially peaceful coexistence between countries in the region, the fact that relationships tend to be labeled 'friendships' rather than 'alliances,' etc.[35] These considerations show the relevance of ideas and allow us to read reality with more precision, which in turn enables us to design our actions more effectively. The fact that Brasil considers Argentina a 'friend' rather than an 'ally,' for example, is a fact that may help us to gauge the limits of the convergence between the two countries.

Our humble contribution lies in the idea that cultural variables are as necessary for an understanding of international reality as material variables like economic activity, debt capacity, geographical location, etc. As Wendt—one of the most representative figures of constructivism—himself maintains, we must not proceed as if material forces did not exist (1999, p. 111). He adds that material forces are not constituted solely by social meanings, and social meanings are not immune to material effects.[36] It is only in the interaction between the two that we can appreciate their real significance.[37]

Another facet in which the examination of cultural variables is unavoidable is the analysis of the decision-making process. A state with a cohesive civil society cannot act at the external level in ways that the society in question is not willing to accept without causing an increase in internal tensions. As proof of this, we need look no further than the pacifist movements in the United States or Canada's suspension of its water export contract with the United States due to it being opposed by Canadian society in general, for whom water resources are entangled with their national identity.

An obvious conclusion to be drawn from the above is that the decision-making process of a Latin American country is not identical to that of a European or Asian country. The time factor, for example, works in a completely different fashion for Latin American countries—where matters tend to be urgent and time appears to move incredibly fast—and for Asian societies—whose plans tend to consider with mid- and long-term issues. This is yet another confirmation that culture is an element that must to be taken in to account if one is to make a judicious assessment of the international situation from the point of view of Argentina—a Latin American developing country that becomes more aligned with South America with each passing day.

## IV. Conclusion

[35] This does not mean that we fail to acknowledge the cultural diversity of different Latin American countries, or the ethnic minorities, much less the process of fragmentation that opposes the South American integration process.

[36] 'Brute material forces have independent effects on international life in at least three ways: 1) The distribution of actors' material capabilities affects the possibility and likelihood of certain outcomes. Military weak states typically cannot conquer powerful ones (…) 2) The "composition" of material capabilities, and in particular the character of the technology they embody, has similar constraining and enabling effects (…) 3)And then there are geography and nature resources. Inhospitable living conditions discourage settlement. Weather patterns affect agriculture.'(Wendt, 1999).

[37] 'It is only because of their interaction with ideas that material forces have the effects that they do. So the relationship between material forces and ideas works both ways, but we can only properly theorize this relationship if we recognize that at some level they are constituted as different kinds of independently existing stuff' (Wendt, 1999).

The dominant theories in international relations have provided the fundamental concepts for the analysis of international phenomena. However, those notions are not fully appropriate for a critical Latin American perspective because they were formulated in the context of developed countries—with their realities and their needs in mind. An undiscriminating application of said concepts to a different reality demands both a 'decontextualization' and a vindication of the dominant order, which is not always convenient for our purposes. For this reason, we find it necessary to question those concepts and possibly their definition, with a view to achieving a better understanding of our reality, so as to be able to act more effectively in the international arena, overcoming underdevelopment and making the region more influential on the international stage.

Starting from that premise, we arrived at the following conclusions: First, the international system shows clear signs of being a hierarchical ordering in which some states have more power than others, regardless of the existence of a margin of maneuverability in which states are free to enact autonomist policies. Second, power is multifaceted and military might is no more than a single manifestation of it. Furthermore, we believe that interstate relations are not essentially conflictive; States cooperate with each other in different areas and those interrelations are opportunities to build up power—by means of issue linking, for example. The state, as en entity in which different sectors of society come together, has a fundamental role to play in Latin America, because it is only through state action that social and economic development can be achieved. Last, we believe that symbolic and cultural factors are relevant to such an extent in all international phenomena that they must necessarily be borne in mind if one wishes to make a complete analysis of reality.

To conclude, we would like to underscore the value of the concepts espoused in this paper: 'international permissiveness' and 'autonomy,' which we believe can be powerful tools to describe and overcome the dependent situation of countries in our region. We insist on the idea that the adoption of a theoretical concept in the field of international relations can determine whether certain actions seems feasible or not in the current international scene. That is the reason why we have chosen an point of view that is diametrically opposed to those based on the pessimistic analysis offered by Escudé. We do not believe that Argentina's peripheral condition is hopeless, but rather that its current status as an underdeveloped country is the product of its own mistakes and that it is still in time to overcome said situation on its own—at least for the present time, as Jaguaribe warns—because it has everything it needs to fulfill that aim.

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Translated by Joaquín Puga

Translation from **Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales**, Buenos Aires, vol.18 no. 37, Mayo/Noviembre 2009.