

'America First': A Stronger Monroe Doctrine

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The previous articles ([first](#), [second](#)) examined what appears to be a coordinated strategy between Moscow and Beijing to contain the damage wrought by the United States around the world. This strategy's effectiveness relies heavily on the geographical position of the two countries vis-a-vis the United States and the area of contention. We have seen how the Sino-Russian strategy has been effective in Asia and the Middle-East, greatly stemming American disorder. Moscow and Beijing have less capacity to contain the US and influence events in Europe, given that much depends on the Europeans themselves, who are officially Washington's allies but are in reality treated as colonies. With the new "America First" doctrine, it is the central and southern parts of the American continent that are on the receiving end of the US struggling to come to terms with the diminishment of its hitherto untrammelled influence in the world.

South and Central American countries blossomed under the reign of socialist or leftist anti-imperialist governments for the first decade of this century. Such terms as "21st-century socialism" were coined, as was documented in the 2010 Oliver Stone documentary film *South of the Border*. The list of countries with leftist governments was impressive: Fernando Lugo (Paraguay), Evo Morales (Bolivia), Lula da Silva (Brazil), Rafael Correa (Ecuador), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Argentina), Fidel Castro (Cuba), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua) and Hugo Chávez (Venezuela).

We can establish a close correlation between Washington's actions since 1989 and the political roller-coaster experienced in South America in the ensuing thirty years.

Washington, drunk on the experience of being the only superpower in the post-Soviet period, sought to lock in her commanding position through the establishment of full-spectrum dominance, a strategy that entails being able to deal with any event in any area of the globe, treating the world as Washington's oyster.

Washington's endeavor to shape the world in her own image and likeness meant in practical terms the military apparatus increasing its power projection through carrier battle groups and a global missile defense, advancing towards the land and sea borders of Russia and China.

Taking advantage of the US dollar's dominance in the economic, financial and commercial arenas, Washington cast aside the principles of the free market, leaving other countries to contend with an unfair playing field.

As later revealed by **Edward Snowden**, Washington exploited her technological dominance to establish a pervasive surveillance system. Guided by the principle of American exceptionalism, combined with a desire to "export democracy", "human rights" became an

enabling justification to intervene in and bomb dozens of countries over three decades, aided and abetted by a compliant and controlled media dominated by the intelligence and military apparatuses.

Central and South America enjoyed an unprecedented political space in the early 2000s as a result of Washington focusing on Russia, China, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Georgia and Ukraine. The Latin Americans exploited this breathing space, with a dozen countries becoming outposts of anti-imperialism within a decade, advancing a strong socialist vision in opposition to free-market fundamentalism.

Both Washington and Moscow placed central importance on South America during the Cold War, which was part of the asymmetric and hybrid war that the two superpowers undertook against each other. The determination by the United States to deny the Soviet Union a presence in the American hemisphere had the world holding its collective breath during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

As any student of international relations knows, the first objective of a regional power is to prevent the emergence of another hegemon in any other part of the world. The reason behind this is to obviate the possibility that the new power may venture into other regions occupied by other hegemonic powers, thereby upsetting the status quo. The second primary objective is to prevent access by a foreign power to its own hemisphere. Washington abides by this principle through its Monroe Doctrine, set forth by President James Monroe, with the United States duly expelling the last European powers from the Americas in the early 19th century.

In analyzing the events in South America, one cannot ignore an obvious trend by Washington. While the United States was intent on expanding its empire around the world by consolidating more than 800 military bases in dozens of countries (numbering about 70), South America was experiencing a political rebirth, positioning itself at the opposite end of the spectrum from Washington, favoring socialism over capitalism and reclaiming the ancient anti-imperialist ideals of Simon Bolivar, a South American hero of the late 18th century.

Washington remained uncaring and indifferent to the political changes of South America, focusing instead on dominating the Middle East through bombs and wars. In Asia, the Chinese economy grew at an impressive rate, becoming the factory of the world. The Russian Federation, from the election of Putin in 2000, gradually returned to being a military power that commanded respect. And with the rise of Iran, destined to be the new regional power in the Middle East thanks to the unsuccessful US intervention in Iraq in 2003, Washington began to dig her own grave without even realizing it.

Meanwhile, South America united under the idea of a common market and a socialist ideology. The Mercosur organization was founded in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. But it was only when Venezuela, led by Chavez, became an associate member in 2004 that the organization assumed a very specific political tone, standing almost in direct opposition to Washington's free-market template.

Meanwhile, China and Russia continued their political, military and economic growth, focusing with particular attention on South America and the vast possibilities of economic integration from 2010. Frequent meetings were held between Russia and China and various

South American leaders, culminating in the creation of the BRICS organization (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Brazil, first with Lula and then with Dilma Rousseff, was the unofficial spokesperson for the whole of South America, aligning the continent with the emerging Eurasian powers. It is during these years, from the birth of the BRICS organization (2008/2009), that the world began a profound transformation flowing from Washington's progressive military decline, consumed as it was by endless wars that ended up eroding Washington's status as a world power. These wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have deeply undermined US military prestige, opening unprecedented opportunities for alliances and future changes to the global order, especially with the rise of Iran's influence in the region as a counterweight to US imperialism.

China, Russia and the South American continent were certainly among the first to understand the potential of this political and historical period; we can recall meetings between Putin and Chavez, or the presence of Chinese leaders at numerous events in South America. Beijing has always offered high-level economic assistance through important trade agreements, while Moscow has sold a lot of advanced military hardware to Venezuela and other South American countries.

Economic and military assistance are the real bargaining chips Moscow and Beijing offer to countries willing to transition to the multipolar revolution while having their backs covered at the same time.

The transformation of the world order from a unipolar to a multipolar system became a fact in 2014 with the return of Crimea to the Russian Federation following the NATO coup in Ukraine. The inability for the US to prevent this fundamental strategic defeat for Brussels and Washington marked the beginning of the end for the Pentagon still clinging on to a world order that disappeared in 1991.

As the multipolar mutation developed, Washington changed tactics, with Obama offering a different war strategy to the one advanced during the George W. Bush presidency. Projecting power around the globe with bombs, carrier battle groups and boots on the ground was no longer viable, with domestic populations being in no mood for any further major wars.

The use of soft power has always been part of the US toolkit for influencing events in other countries; but given the windfall of the unipolar moment, soft power was set aside in favor of hard power. However, following the failures of explicit hard power from 1990 to 2010, soft power was back in favor, and organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) set about training and financing organizations in dozens of hostile countries to subvert governments by underhanded means (colour revolutions, the Arab Spring, etc.).

Among those on the receiving end of this soft-power onslaught were the South American countries deemed hostile to Washington, already under capitalist-imperialist pressure for a number of years in the form of sanctions.

It is during this time that South America suffered a side effect of the new multipolar world order. The United States started retreating home after losing influence around the globe. This effectively meant focusing once again on its own backyard: Central and South America.

Covert efforts to subvert governments with socialist ideas in the hemisphere increased.

First, Kirchner's Argentina saw the country pass into the hands of the neoliberal Macri, a friend of Washington. Then Dilma Rousseff was expelled as President of Brazil through the unlawful maneuvers of her own parliament, following which Lula was imprisoned, allowing for Bolsonaro, a fan of Washington, to win the presidential election.

In Ecuador, Lenin Moreno, the successor of Correa, betrayed his party and his people by being a cheerleader for the Pentagon, even protesting the asylum granted to Assange in Ecuador's embassy in London. In Venezuela following Chavez's suspicious death, Maduro was immediately targeted by the US establishment as the most prominent representative of an anti-imperialist and anti-American Chavismo. The increase in sanctions and the seizure of assets further worsened the situation in Venezuela, leading to the disaster we are seeing today.

South America finds itself in a peculiar position as a result of the world becoming more multipolar. The rest of the world now has more room to maneuver and greater independence from Washington as a result of the military and economic umbrella offered by Moscow and Beijing respectively.

But for geographic and logistical reasons, it is more difficult for China and Russia to extend the same guarantees and protections to South America as they do in Asia, the Middle East and Europe. We can nevertheless see how Beijing offers an indispensable lifeline to Caracas and other South American countries like Nicaragua and Haiti in order to enable them to withstand Washington's immense economic pressure.

Beijing's strategy aims to limit the damage Washington can inflict on the South American continent through Beijing's economic power, without forgetting the numerous Chinese interests in the region, above all the new canal between the Atlantic and the Pacific that runs through Nicaragua (it is no coincidence that the country bears the banner of anti-imperialist socialism) that will be integrated into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Moscow's objective is more limited but just as refined and dangerous to Washington's hegemony. A glimpse of Moscow's asymmetrical military power was given when two Russian strategic bombers flew to Venezuela less than four months ago, sending an unmistakable signal to Washington. Moscow has the allies and the technical and military capacity to create an air base with nuclear bombers not all that far away from the coast of Florida.

Moscow and Beijing do not intend to allow Washington to mount an eventual armed intervention in Venezuela, which would open the gates of hell for the continent. Moscow and Beijing have few interlocutors left on the continent because of the political positions of several countries like Argentina, Brazil and Colombia, which far prefer an alliance with Washington over one with Moscow or Beijing. We can here see the tendency of the Trump administration to successfully combine its "America First" policy with the economic and military enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine, simultaneously pleasing his base and the hawks in his administration.

Leaving aside a possible strategy (Trump tends to improvise), it seems that Trump's domestic political battle against the Democrats, declared lovers of socialism (naturally not as strident as the original Soviet or Chavist kind), has combined with a foreign-policy battle against South American countries that have embraced socialism.

The contribution from China and Russia to the survival of the South American continent is limited in comparison to what they have been able to do in countries like Syria, not to

mention the deterrence created by Russia in Ukraine in defending the Donbass or with China vis-a-vis North Korea.

The multipolar revolution that is changing the world in which we live in will determine the rest of the century. One of the final battles is being played out in South America, in Venezuela, and its people and the Chavist revolution are at the center of the geopolitical chessboard, as is Syria in the Middle East, Donbass in Central Europe, Iran in the Persian Gulf, and the DPRK in Asia. These countries are at the center of the shift from a unipolar to a multipolar world order, and the success of this shift will be seen if these countries are able to resist US imperialism as a result of Moscow and Beijing respectively offering military help and deterrence and economic survival and alternatives.

Russia and China have all the necessary means to place limits on the United States, protecting the world from a possible thermonuclear war and progressively offering an economic, social and diplomatic umbrella to those countries that want to move away from Washington and enjoy the benefits of living in a multipolar reality, advancing their interests based on their needs and desires and favoring sovereignty and national interest over bending over to please Washington.

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