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REALISM IN THE PERIPHERY

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Peripheral realism (RP, from the Spanish, *realismo periférico*) is an approach to international relations (IR) theory developed mainly in Buenos Aires during the 1990s. It features both an explicative and a normative dimension. Because its prescriptive facet derives logically from its explicative conception, here we must work our way from theoretical abstraction to basic policy guidelines.

RP draws from political realism, especially its IR version, which it purports to correct, contesting the neorealist notion that the structure of the international system is “anarchic” (Waltz 1979), and contending instead that it is an imperfect and incipient “hierarchy.” Its terminology is akin to the Raúl Prebisch–ECLA center–periphery perspective (Dosman 2010). And it is inspired by a Thucydidean awareness of the consequences of asymmetrical power relationships between states. As David Close (2009, 236) has argued, it is an attempt at “making realism more realistic.”

RP was fueled by historiographical studies (see Simonoff 2003) that revealed the costs, to Latin American countries, of systematic political confrontations with the US, the power that has been the most relevant external constraint to their foreign policies since 1942 (in the case of the Southern Cone states), and through most of their independent history (in the case of the rest).

RP is not, however, limited to Latin American countries nor to the asymmetries posed by their relationship with the US. In the case of the Southern Cone, the time may be approaching when peripheral realist analysis will be geared mainly toward their relationship with China (Escudé 2012), just as before World War II it would have focused on their relationship with the UK. By 2013 China was already the most important customer of both Brazil and Chile, and Argentina’s second, preceded only by Brazil. Despite the size of its market, the US buys less from Argentina than does Chile.¹ Indeed, in the Southern Cone, China seems to be displacing the US as the single most important extra-regional presence and constraint.

On the other hand, the focus of RP is not on the relations between peripheral countries and whoever happens to be the hegemon but, rather, on the consequences of relevant extreme asymmetry. It is not to be discarded that Bolivia’s peripheral realism should focus more on Brazil than on the US or China.

Finally, by way of an operational definition, “peripheral states” are those whose economies are deeply affected by cycles of expansion and contraction of the world economy without sharing significantly in their generation and whose position in the interstate system is such that they play a modest role in the establishment of the written rules of the system and practically no role in the establishment of its unwritten statutes. Thus, the concept of “peripheral states” comprises the

entire “Third World,” including most so-called emerging powers, plus small and middle-sized fully developed countries whose vulnerability would be great if they played their interstate politics game without due attention to systemic constraints. Although we focus mainly on Latin America, conceptually this spectrum of states ranges from Belgium to Bolivia.

The Proto-Hierarchical Structure of Interstate Order

Building IR theory can be easy. If we know what questions to ask, a simple comparison of the foreign policies of two peripheral states with opposite behaviors can contribute to uncover the structure of world order. Let us exemplify with a brief look at the cases of present-day Iran and Argentina.

Since the Islamic Revolution, Iranian foreign policy presupposes that world order is a jungle without rules, where it is legitimate to promote a state’s interests through any means, including proxy warfare and terrorism. It contends that states are equally sovereign and that it is unacceptable that some have the right to own nuclear weapons while others are denied that right. Some might call it a revisionist state.

In contrast, Argentine behavior since 1990 is based on the assumption that the interstate order has written and unwritten rules and that, regrettable as it may be, powerful states have a much more important role than do weaker ones in establishing these rules. With silent resignation, it acknowledges that Buenos Aires cannot aspire to the development of some weapons deemed acceptable for the oligopoly of the most powerful states, which is represented by, but not limited to, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. And it implicitly admits that even if the US sometimes uses drug money to finance terrorist insurgent organizations abroad (McCoy 2003; Scott 2007), which act as its proxies, this does not mean that Argentina can do the same.

This is quite the opposite of Iran, which contributes to finance Hamas and Hezbollah. The Iranian model (which is also that of North Korea and all the so-called rogue states) generates huge costs for itself that are inevitably paid by the citizenries of these weak and poor countries that rebel against the system. In contrast, the present Argentine model is shared by all the so-called responsible states, including the vast majority of Latin American and European countries.

The proto-hierarchical character of the interstate structure can be perceived clearly in postwar Europe. Once the hardships generated by World War II were overcome, the Western European states did not resume their former power politics but rather abdicated part of their military might to the US. Europe remains a partially occupied continent. The UK hosts five air bases that are entirely at the service of the US. The US stronghold in Italy, Camp Darby, is one of the largest army bases in Europe. And in Germany there are still some twenty significant US military installations.

These facts uncover the limits of the international freedom of maneuver of each and every state, even the most powerful ones. They provide an insight to the domestic conditioning to which the exercise of sovereignty is subject. European states have resigned sovereignty to the US because not doing so would have led to greater citizen costs, straining governability. And since the 1990s, Argentina has conformed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Missile Technology Control Regime for the same reason. These states have not wanted to pay the costs of “full sovereignty” accepted by Iran under the Islamic Revolution, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, North Korea under the Kims, and Argentina under General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri.

Upping the ante, these facts also help to explain that only with the imposition of a fully totalitarian regime can the international freedom of maneuver of a state be limitless. This iron law of political science is verified even for the most powerful state of all times.

Indeed, after the Vietnam War, the democratic consensus in the US led to the elimination of the military draft, imposing severe limitations on its capacity to deploy troops. Whereas during World War II it sent more than 11 million soldiers abroad, presently it would have difficulties

deploying 1 million. Today, if a US government wanted to conquer the Persian Gulf, it would probably have to break its own laws, because enacting the necessary legislation would be politically impossible. And for the even more ambitious objective of waging a preemptive war of invasion against Russia, it would have to become a despotism that arbitrarily disposes of the lives and wealth of its own citizens.

Hence, the aforementioned principle can be formalized in the following equation:

$$TOTAL\ STATE\ "FREEDOM" = ABSOLUTE\ DOMESTIC\ TYRANNY$$

This "equation of universal meta-political equilibrium" is a political-scientific law valid for all states. But its very formulation uncovers the stratification of the interstate order, because *the weaker a country is, the lower the threshold beyond which the exercise of external autonomy demands imposing limits on the freedom and wealth of its citizens* (Escudé 1997, 17).

France, for example, can intervene in some of its former African colonies without having to impose an unacceptable toll on its own people, but that is more or less its limit. It could not have the US's presence in the Middle East without oppressing the French. Due to differences in wealth and military power between them, the White House can do democratically what the Elysium could only do dictatorially.

Going down on the scale of wealth, it is only because its people are muzzled that Iran can afford a nuclear program. Its underdevelopment is such that it lacks the capacity to refine its own oil. Its citizenry, which by all accounts is relatively moderate, would probably never vote for a nuclear program that entails extravagant costs and sanctions. The Teheran regime can take pride in defying the West on this score only because it is a dictatorship.

Going down further in the international totem, North Korea can exercise its sovereign right to have nuclear weapons only because it subjects its own people to an extreme totalitarianism. Only thus can a pauper state concentrate its minute resources in the development of such an expensive weapon, absorbing extreme international sanctions.

To summarize, in order to increase a state's margin of international maneuver it is necessary to invest great human and material resources. Thus, the poorer a country is, the lower that margin of maneuver will be unless its state subjects its citizens to increasing degrees of authoritarianism.

As a consequence, the interstate order can never be democratic or egalitarian. In the absence of a global cosmopolitan order with a single government and electorate, the world order is of necessity hierarchical.

Indeed, states do not have the same rights. A few have the power needed to contribute to the establishment of interstate rules, while the great majority is forced to behave according to the rules imposed by this oligopoly. And there is also a third category of states which, though lacking the power to contribute to the establishment of global rules, rebel against them, imposing severe costs upon their own citizens. In other words, the interstate order is composed of three types of states:

1. Rule makers
2. Rule takers
3. Rebel states

The periphery includes both the rule takers (no matter how developed) and the rebels. This, and not neorealism's "anarchy," is the proto-hierarchical structure of the interstate system (Escudé 1997, 64).

This simple theorem is the cornerstone of peripheral realism. Although rarely accepted explicitly by governments, it is the reason why most Latin American and European states behave as they do.

Those who defy the interstate hierarchy almost always lose. Iran will lose. North Korea will lose. Venezuela is on the verge of either losing or changing its policies. Saddam Hussein's Iraq already lost, just as, in a less costly way, Galtieri's Argentina lost in 1982. And revolutionary Cuba has managed to survive, but at a huge expense for its people and without a compensatory increase in its state power.

Notwithstanding these frustrations, the international order is not crystallized. The best proofs that this is not the case are the postwar histories of Germany and Japan. Devastated, they accepted the political and military rules set by the victors. But they labored and defended their commercial and financial interests with such force that they are now economic superpowers, with the capacity of becoming great military powers if they chose to. This, and not sterile political rebellion against the written and unwritten rules of the world order, seems to be the more workable way out of the periphery for a developing state.

The world out there is cruel and laden with double standards, which are explained by the proto-hierarchical nature of the interstate order. The US, for example, claims it wages wars on terror and drugs, but it has used both terror and drugs to carry out its international strategies. Islamist terrorists began to be financed by the US during the Carter administration, as a part of an effort to destabilize the Soviet Union (Scott 2007, 117). By February 1982, under the Reagan administration, Attorney General William French Smith had waived the obligation of the Central Intelligence Agency to inform on drug transactions carried out by its officials and agents, thus making it possible to fund undercover operations with drug money that would not be subject to the scrutiny of the US government or Congress. The method was famously used in Nicaragua, fueling the Contras against the Sandinistas, and in Afghanistan, fueling terrorist Islamist organizations against the Soviets (Cooley 2002, 111; McCoy 2003, 495).

Not every country can engage in this sort of narco-terrorism without becoming a "rogue state." Only the rule makers can, as well as some rule takers that act as their proxies. But if Mexico does it on its own, it becomes a pariah, suffering grave consequences.

This is not anyone's normative ideal, but it is a simple fact of life. A realist school that does not acknowledge this essential difference in the rule-making and rule-taking functions of different categories of states is a contradiction in terms. It is not true that "the functions of states are similar." It may be that this is easier seen from the periphery than from the center of the world system, but states are not "like units," as Kenneth Waltz (1979, 88, 97) mistakenly contended.

The Anthropomorphic and State-Centric Fallacies in IR Discourse

But the replacement of interstate anarchy with hierarchy does not suffice to clean up realist theory. The myth of anarchy comes accompanied by other fallacies. If the idea that no state is entitled to command and none is required to obey is taken seriously, then it is only natural that both theoreticians and statespersons should forget the intricacies of what Robert Cox called "the state-society complex" and tend to think of the state as if it were an individual. In turn, this mode of discourse leads to yet more flawed thinking and unintentional normative biases.

Indeed, the state-as-person fiction is a major theoretical hazard. RP's critique of state personhood, first published a decade before Alexander Wendt's well-known 2004 paper on the subject, focuses on the often unnoticed practical and theoretical consequences of the anthropomorphic language that we use when referring to states in terms of "weak" or "strong" actors who "suffer," are "honored" or "humiliated," have "pride" and aspire to "glory."

This language obscures the fact that, oftentimes, when a weak state challenges a strong one at a great cost to itself we are not witnessing an epic of courage but, rather, the sacrifice of the interests, welfare, and even the lives of multitudes of poor people to the vanity of their elite. The very fact that this is being obscured biases the value structure of IR theory. If, in addition, the

myth of interstate anarchy informs one's vision of world order, then the room for serious theoretical flaw and normative bias is enormous.

Indeed, when we speak of states we usually engage in what E.H. Carr pioneeringly called "the fiction of the group-person" (1962, 149). As a consequence, we unknowingly tend to adopt attitudes toward states and their policies that would be fitting for individuals but are clearly unsuitable vis-à-vis institutions and politicians, who are in turn responsible for the rights and interests of individuals. The fallacy lies in unwittingly supposing that the state is to the interstate system what the individual is to the state. And in likening the state to the individual, one inadvertently legitimizes totalitarianism.

This state-centric fallacy is present since the birth of international law as a field of study. In his *Droit de Gens*, Emeric Vattel expounded on "the liberty of states" without realizing that, all other things being equal, the individual will be less free the freer his/her state is vis-à-vis other states.

That Vattel should have incurred in this fallacy in 1758 may be simply quaint. But that Robert O. Keohane (1986, 186) should have written that

an actor with intense preferences on an issue may be willing to use more resources to attain a high probability of a favorable result than an actor with more resources but lower intensity (preferences)

is more disturbing, insofar as the expression "intense preferences" conceals often unpleasant structural and political facts of life.

This is a recurring theme in mainstream IR theory. Indeed, Keohane was paraphrasing his and Joseph S. Nye's previous words when they wrote jointly that "poor, weak states" can sometimes impose their policies on stronger ones because they "may be more willing to suffer" (Keohane and Nye 1977, 18–19, 53)

Needless to say, states do not suffer, because they have no nervous system. It is people who can be plunged into suffering when a weak state attempts to impose itself on a stronger one. Yet the fallacious analogy between states and people engenders a theoretical illusion that is hard to overcome, to the point that Kenneth Waltz (1979, 112) explicitly noted that "[s]tates, like people, are insecure to the extent of their freedom. If freedom is wanted, insecurity must be accepted."

Unwittingly, this is almost a glorification of tyranny, insofar as this "freedom" of states often leads to the subjection of masses of individual men and women who are mercilessly thrown into battle and destruction (Escudé 1997, 32–35).

The list of such theoretical *faux pas* in mainstream Anglo-American IR theory is endless. They are not a trivial matter, because they tend to legitimize some authoritarian practices of states. And it is not surprising that those theoretical errors should have been first detected in Latin America rather than in the US. This is a region where, until approximately 1983, a justificatory discourse of authoritarianism was no less commonplace than were dictatorships themselves, making local liberal scholars understandably more sensitive to the corruption of theory through the careless use of metaphors and false analogies.

Anthropomorphisms and Local "Nationalisms" in Latin America

If IR theory was contaminated with unintended normative biases, it was only expectable that political and popular discourse in Latin America should have been even more affected by diverse versions of these state-centric fallacies. The present author first became aware of the problem in 1984, when interviewed by a radio journalist who asked for his opinion on the statements of an

Argentine cabinet minister who had decried that his country was “on its knees” before the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The interviewee’s reflection was that, not being an economist, he would not opine on what Argentina’s policy vis-à-vis the IMF should be. He only knew one thing for certain: Argentina has no knees.

This sentence completely deactivated the emotionalism of the interview, which went on to focus on the idea that the issue was not that the country was “on its knees,” but rather what policy vis-à-vis its debt would generate more welfare (or less hardship) for the *citizens* of Argentina.

The episode is much more than anecdotal, insofar as it teaches how an incautious use of analogies can distort not only theory but also policy and public opinion. This is as true today as when RP was being developed. A case in point is a headline of the Venezuelan daily *El Nacionalista*, published June 16, 2008, that read “Venezuela Refused to Continue on its Knees vis-à-vis the Pretensions of the U.S. Government.” A few weeks before, on May 8, President Hugo Chávez himself had said that Venezuela “would not watch crossed-armed” while Bolivia was driven into territorial disintegration by imperialist forces.² The image of Venezuela with its arms crossed is one of slovenliness and negligence, while the image of it on its knees is humiliating. They both generate outrage and the need to set things “right.” Thus, reason and cost–benefit analysis are replaced by emotions, this being one of the most important functions of anthropomorphic metaphors, which awake passions and move people into action.

Such flawed thinking, common to individuals as diverse as Chávez and Keohane, sometimes leads to misguided policies. The contamination of both Latin American political discourse and Anglo-American IR theory with values that unwittingly creep into the fabric of policy has consequences. David-and-Goliath metaphors are dangerous when applied to states. They can make self-destructive brinkmanship popular, as in the case of the 1982 Falkland/Malvinas War, in which Argentina invaded a territory occupied since 1833 by the UK, a major rule-making state.

Citizen-Centric versus State-Centric Theory

This is the reason why the liberal values informing its normative dimension are explicitly set forth in RP, which proposes a “citizen-centric” doctrine, as opposed to the unintended “state-centric” bias that contaminated most previous theory and discourse.

This methodological tactic is complementary with another finding: that contrariwise to Hans Morgenthau’s (1948, 4–5) assumption, in the case of peripheral states “the main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics” is not “the concept of interest defined in terms of power” but, rather, the notion of interest defined in terms of economic development.

One thing leads to the other in a neat, parsimonious way. Explicative theory is a prelude to normative doctrine. Inversely, normativity impinges on state behavior and on our understanding of the state itself. For example, a state-centric frame of mind or doctrine can easily lead to a refusal to sign the NPT. This was the case with Argentina and Brazil before 1995 and 1998, respectively, and continues to hold for India, Pakistan and Israel, the only countries that have never signed the treaty.

Contrariwise, a switch to a more democratic, citizen-centric focus in the foreign policies of both Argentina and Brazil led these countries, which are relatively secure from external military threats, to eventually acquiesce to the NPT regime. Thus, international sanctions were avoided, and considerable financial resources were released for hopefully better uses.

Although the problematic nature of the “guns” and “butter” mix in a state’s policy has always been acknowledged by IR scholars, the sometimes unintended state-centric bias of mainstream realist theory has highlighted the “guns” to the detriment of the “butter.” RP has

corrected this distortion by observing that economic development may be the only way out of the periphery. Thus, the citizen-centric approach of RP inverted the traditional distinction between “high” and “low” politics. In Argentina, this realist rationale largely explains the Menem administration’s foreign policy shift vis-à-vis the long-standing tradition of political confrontation with the West.

The Fallacy of Autonomy

Correcting realist theory on these core issues leads to an examination of the concept of “autonomy,” which is very dear to Third World IR discourse. From the days in which RP was being coined, to the present, the notion has been profusely used by Latin American politicians.

In a press statement of October 21, 1986, for example, Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín asserted that his government sought “an autonomy of position that is absolutely indispensable to formulate its own policies, define its own road to development and consolidate the individual freedom of (Argentina’s) inhabitants” (Escudé 1992, 126). These words were meant to justify a trip to Havana, which was a stop after a trip to Moscow.

And a quarter century later, on December 2, 2011, during a Latin American summit leading to the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which aspires to replace the US-led Organization of American States, Ecuadorean president Rafael Correa said that this is “a step forward toward . . . greater regional autonomy.”³

From the 1970s until very recently, the concept was also used frequently by specialists in the field as if it were unproblematic. Rarely was it explicitly defined. It was taken for granted that “states seek autonomy,” but authors often engaged in tautology (“to be autonomous is to develop autonomously”). It was usually implicitly defined in terms of the “freedom of choice” or “margin of maneuver” of a foreign policy (Escudé 1992, 126–136).

The Brazilian political scientist Hélio Jaguaribe (1974, 64–66), for example, wrote that at a certain level autonomy means a set of conditions that allow free decisions to be taken by persons and agencies that are part of a national or regional system. And the Argentine internationalist Juan Carlos Puig (1984, 44) wrote that “the achievement of a greater autonomy presupposes a previous zero-sum strategic game.” Thus, for his school, political confrontation with the hegemon is a requisite for the growth of a peripheral state’s autonomy. Needless to say, the US was and continues to be perceived as the overwhelming obstacle to this autonomy.

Only with the launching of RP did scholarly debate on the subject begin (see Simonoff 2003; Russell and Tokatlian 2003). Notwithstanding this growing debate, throughout the Third World “autonomy” often continues to be an end in itself that competes with “national security” and “development” as the primary objective of foreign policy. For various reasons (social structure, political culture, political system, alliance opportunities, etc.), this is not usually the case of fully developed peripheral countries, which are closer to RP without a need for an explicit RP theory. Third World statespersons are more obsessed with autonomy. And oftentimes, “to be autonomous” really means “to appear to be autonomous.” To this day, numerous Latin American scholars, perhaps even a majority, support such policies, staunchly vindicating Puig’s legacy.

Furthermore, as illustrated by Alfonsín’s quotation earlier, it is often suggested that autonomy leads to development. This notion is complementary to the idea that dependence leads to underdevelopment, and both hypotheses spring from the Latin American tradition of dependency theory and are part of a conventional wisdom that is sometimes applied in policy making.

Both notions, in turn, have been reinforced by the imported interdependence rhetoric of IR theory, through the generation of expectations of an increased margin of maneuver for peripheral

states, which encourage “autonomous” decisions. Thus, liberal US scholars have unknowingly contributed to endowing this fallacy with yet stronger roots. The fallacy is odd, insofar as it seems clear that usually, development generates autonomy.

These conceptual issues are well exemplified through an analysis of Alfonsín’s 1986 trip to Moscow and Havana, mentioned before. Then as now, Cuba was an insignificant trading partner for Argentina. Alfonsín’s stop there was in no way connected to Argentina’s development or to the welfare of its inhabitants. In contrast, his trip to Moscow was connected to development because the USSR was then a major trading partner of Argentina, a situation inherited from the military regime’s decision to challenge Carter’s 1980 grain embargo against the Soviets.

But the symbolic trip to Cuba was not associated with the generation of autonomy. A decision not to go to Cuba would not have been a less autonomous course of action, just as Japan was not less autonomous for not courting Fidel Castro. Not going to Cuba would simply have been a different way of using an autonomy that was already there no matter how a government chose to use it.

Although this should be obvious, the victims of the fallacy of autonomy include not only Latin American politicians but also well-known US specialists in the field. The literature is plagued with titles as meaningless as “Between Autonomy and Subordination” or “Between Hegemony and Autonomy.” An interesting case in point is an important book by Joseph S. Tulchin (1990, 41), in which he states candidly that

[w]hen special British representative Lord D’Abernon visited Argentina during Yrigoyen’s second administration at the end of the 1920s, Yrigoyen chose to strengthen its ties with Britain, thus postponing for another decade any Argentine efforts to effect independent and autonomous decision-making in international affairs.

There is a clear logical contradiction between “choosing” to strengthen ties with Britain and abdicating “independent and autonomous decision-making in international affairs.” Choosing to strengthen ties with Britain is simply a way of using autonomy.

On the other hand, very seldom do we find that a middle-sized state is absolutely impeded, *externally*, from opting for autarchy, isolation and radicalization. Argentina quarreled with Britain and the US when its leaders so chose, even waging war in 1982. And it strengthened ties with Britain and/or the US when its leaders chose such an alternative course. The same holds true for most Latin American countries.

The former decisions were not more “autonomous” than the latter. It is absurd that confrontation should define autonomy. Middle-sized states such as Brazil, Mexico or Venezuela have so much “autonomy” (defined as freedom of choice or of maneuver) that they could even destroy themselves. In reality, every middle-sized state has an almost limitless freedom of choice. Otherwise, the Saddams, the Khomeinis, the Khadafys and the Galtieris of this world would be harmless.

Therefore, RP posits that it is not conceptually useful to define autonomy in terms of freedom of choice or of maneuver. Rather, autonomy should be defined in terms of *the costs* of using the freedom of choice and maneuver that any middle-sized state has almost limitlessly.

Furthermore, a double distinction should be made: that between autonomy itself and the use a state makes of it and that between the different types of uses of autonomy. Autonomy itself (defined as *the costs* of using an almost limitless freedom of maneuver) is a consequence of power and therefore, to a large extent, of development (insofar as power is insignificant without a minimum economic base). And autonomy thus defined can be put to use

- to generate more development or power, which RP theory calls “investment of autonomy;”
- or simply exhibited and spent, which RP theory calls “consumption of autonomy.”

In terms of our example, Alfonsín's stopover in Moscow was an investment, whilst his scale in Havana was mere consumption. The US State Department objected to both. Going to Moscow was well worth risking its wrath; going to Havana, less so (Escudé 1992, 126–127).

Given RP's explicit citizen-centric normative orientation, development goals are by definition the priority of any Third World state, and well-calculated investments of autonomy are of the national interest even if they risk triggering punitive action by a great power. Contrariwise, a mere consumption of autonomy that generates a negative image of that state among powers on which it is dependent (or on which it could eventually depend) is unadvisable, even if there are no immediate tangible costs.

Some Examples of Applied Peripheral Realism

Policies akin with the normative orientations of RP have been executed and/or advised through the ages, with mixed results. They were advocated by Thucydides for Melos vis-à-vis Athens, by the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah for Judah vis-à-vis Babylon, and by the rabbinical sage Johanan ben Zakai, also for Judah but vis-à-vis Rome. Two millennia later, they were successfully implemented in postwar Japan and Western Europe vis-à-vis the US and in East Germany vis-à-vis the USSR.

In Brazil they were applied in the late nineteenth century under the diplomatic leadership of the Baron of Rio Branco, when Brazil forged a special relationship with the US, and during both world wars, when Rio de Janeiro got on the bandwagon with Washington and received tangible benefits (Hilton 1979).

Similarly, Mexico's foreign policy under Vicente Fox (2000–2006) has been characterized as peripheral realist. He supported some of Washington's key Latin American policies, such as the aborted Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the successful campaign to keep the Chávez regime out of the United Nation's Security Council. His first foreign minister, Jorge G. Castañeda, explicitly said that Mexico's foreign policy should be "an instrument to promote and strengthen Mexico's socioeconomic development," replacing the sovereignty-obsessed Estrada Doctrine with the so-called Castañeda Doctrine, which in substantive ways converges with RP's normative dimension (Domínguez-Rivera 2004).

Another important case in point is Colombia, especially under the governments of Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002) and Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010). Pastrana proposed aligning his country with the USA through a conciliation of Washington's foremost interest in Colombia (the struggle against drug trafficking) and the Bogotá government's main interest (the war against the FARC guerrillas). This led to the well-known Plan Colombia, which was expanded during the Uribe administration. During this period the US poured billions of dollars in Colombia, with debatable results for both states (Tickner 2009, 58–60).

Finally, one of the most striking among the numerous examples of applied RP is that of Argentina between 1989 and 1999. What makes it noteworthy is that its previous policies had been, during decades, quite the opposite of what RP would have counseled. Indeed, until its dramatic shift of the 1990s, the country held a unique position in the region in terms of its confrontations with the US. Ever since the first Pan American Conference of 1889 it had systematically antagonized Washington in diplomatic fora, being neutral during both world wars. Under Peronism it championed a so-called Third Position, and it eventually joined the Non-Aligned Movement.

Furthermore, its confrontational profile was not limited to the US. War almost broke out with Chile in 1978. Until 1979, relations with Brazil were tense and for a time included a nuclear race. And in 1982 it invaded the disputed Falkland/Malvinas Islands.

Neither defeat at war nor the democratization that followed in 1983 modified these trends. Under Alfonsín, Buenos Aires

1. refused to sign the NPT and the Tlatelolco Treaty for the prohibition of nuclear weapons in Latin America;
2. devoted its scarce resources to the enrichment of uranium (which its energy-producing reactors that ran on natural uranium did not need);
3. undertook a joint venture with Saddam Hussein's Iraq for the development of an intermediate-range guided missile, the C3dndor II, which would have been able to deliver a nuclear warhead over a distance of 1,000 kilometers, changing the strategic equilibrium of the Middle East; and
4. had, by 1990, the fourth-most anti-US voting profile in the United Nations General Assembly (Escud3 1992).

In contrast, Brazil, which is the best counterexample, engaged in similar nuclear policies but did not develop a ballistic missile system in conjunction with Saddam Hussein, and did not wage war on any country in the twentieth century except against the enemies of democracy in both world wars. Thus, it never made itself a target for destabilization.

Historiographical research undertaken during the late 1970s and early 1980s, based on formerly secret US and UK documents, demonstrated that such policies could generate enormous costs for a vulnerable state such as Argentina. Especially, it was a proven fact that the US had no qualms about unleashing covert and overt sanctions and discriminations, the like of which had ruined Argentina during World War II and its aftermath (Escud3 1983).

From the basis of this historical experience, by 1989 it could safely be stated that Argentina's foreign policy profile was self-destructive and that the pseudo-scientific rhetoric springing from the dependency, autonomist and mainstream realist paradigms was doing damage.

Reacting against such radicalism, during the 1990s Argentina's policies were subjected to a no-less-radical RP experiment. The country's previous confrontational profile with the West was replaced by a politico-military alignment with the US in global and security issues. Buenos Aires's capacity to wage war was voluntarily reduced to almost nil. The military budget suffered a drastic cut, the arms industry was dismantled and the military draft was abolished. Argentina's foreign and security policies ceased to respond to a typical nation-state rationale, approaching a citizen-centric and cosmopolitan logic based on the liberal assumption that the state is not an end in itself but only a means to protect the rights and interests of its individual citizens, who are parties to a democratic social compact.

Unfortunately, this policy change came accompanied by neoliberal economic policies, which are in no way associated theoretically with RP, that were tainted by massive government corruption. As a consequence, Argentina's policies of the 1990s failed, and by December 2001 the country was suffering a political, financial and social collapse.

Notwithstanding, there can be little doubt in this author's mind that, if on top of its corrupt and misguided economic policies of the 1990s, Argentina had persisted in its confrontational course with the West, developing nuclear and missile technology without safeguards and selling it to rogue states, the outcome would have been even more calamitous. It may be that RP saved Argentina from much greater evils. This, however, is a conjecture that cannot be proved.

On the other hand, it is a paradox that RP had a significant immediate doctrinal forerunner in the thought of Deng Xiaoping, who did not fail. Toward the end of the 1980s he understood that systematic confrontations between his country and the West had triggered anti-Chinese

policies that had helped keep his country locked in the periphery. He also anticipated the eclipse of the USSR, guessing that the scene was set for a long period of U.S. international hegemony (Lanxin 2008, 50–51).

His prime objective was economic modernization. And seeking to avert the repetition of previous frustrations, he developed a Chinese peripheral realism, which he called the “twenty-four character guideline for foreign policy.” He counseled “never assume a leadership position,” and acknowledged that countries that systematically quarrel with the US usually lose. “Keep a low profile and achieve something,” he admonished in the last eight characters of his famous guideline (Shixue 2008, 31).

For a time, this grand strategy practically eliminated geopolitical considerations from China’s foreign policy. It was successful. The Peoples’ Republic of China earned consideration as a relatively trustworthy state, and by 1997 it was able to recover Hong Kong through peaceful means, standing in sharp contrast to Argentina’s Falkland/Malvinas frustration of 1982.

Over and beyond the obvious distance in country magnitudes, the main difference leading to the striking counterpoint between the success of Deng’s RP and the failure of Argentina’s lay in China’s staunch defense of its economic interests vis-à-vis Argentina’s shameful, corrupt sellout of the 1990s.

But this, of course, was not the failure of peripheral realism but of Argentina itself.

By Way of Conclusion—Some Elementary Normative Guidelines

The combination of historiographical research on the costs, to Argentina, of past confrontations with the hegemonic powers of the West, plus the refutation of mainstream IR theory’s myth of anarchy and related concepts, makes it possible for RP to advance from explicative theory to normative doctrine, leading to the drafting of a few simple guidelines for the foreign policy of peripheral states (Escudé 1992, 44–47; 2012):

- In a liberal democracy, the principal function of the foreign policy of a peripheral state should be to serve its individual citizens.
- Socioeconomic development is the very definition of the national interest of such a country, especially if it does not face credible external military threats.
- Until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the US was the single most important external constraint to success in the Latin American region. It continues to occupy this place for most countries therein.
- Because of its proven capacity to cause damage, well documented in the case of the US boycott against Argentina of the 1940s (Escudé 1983), it is in the best interests—“realism”—of a peripheral country located within its sphere of influence to have good relations with that power, *so long as this does not entail sacrificing its own material interests*, which are paramount (Escudé 1992, 44–45).
- What should be avoided are symbolic political confrontations, in order to better negotiate tangible economic interests in which the people’s well-being is at stake.
- History, however, continues to unravel. Toward the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, China is rapidly replacing the US as both the most interesting external opportunity and the most serious economic threat for some of the more important South American countries.
- Much of what has been suggested in the past regarding US–Southern Cone relations may now be valid for the relations between these countries and China, which should be studied under a peripheral realist perspective.

- Furthermore, it is also worth considering whether center-periphery relations are developing between Brazil and Argentina. By 2013 it seems clear that the latter's successive economic failures, added to its military collapse, have generated a structural subordination which is worth researching in terms of RP theory.

Some might consider that an excess of RP is what led to Argentina's full unilateral disarmament and to its increasing unviability as a full-fledged peripheral state, as are its immediate neighbors, Chile and Brazil.

But, on the other hand, had RP prevailed in Argentina's long-term policies, the Falkland/Malvinas War, which unleashed the country's military debacle, would never have taken place. Indeed, although its leaders would not acknowledge it, in the long historical term, Brazil's policies have been much more consistently peripheral realist than Argentina's (see Hilton 1979).

By their fruit ye shall know them.

Notes

- 1 CIA/*World Factbook 2013*, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook.
- 2 Página 12, May 8, 2008, www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/ultimas/20-103812-2008-05-08.html.
- 3 President Rafael Correa's statement was recorded on his arrival in Venezuela in December 2011. "Correa: CELAC, paso adelante a la autonomía," YouTube video, 4:41, posted by TeleSUR TV, December 2, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cMff-Fw6U8.

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