A Latin American perspective on the key drivers of future international security trends

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Analysts widely agree on several factors and developments that have significantly reshaped international security over the past two decades. These factors fall into two main categories. First, those that directly impact state power and global power distribution. Second, those influencing how state and non-state actors perceive and prioritise their security concerns in the face of evolving threats, risks and vulnerabilities. Although core primary drivers of change concerning the global security landscape are identifiable, the interpretations of their impact on security referents at different levels of analysis, from the individual to the international, have varied greatly as well as the priorities assigned to them in the realm of security and defence policymaking.

The first set of core drivers of change comprises traditional geopolitical issues such as the reinvigorated quest for global hegemony encompassing all power dimensions (political, economic, military, social, technological and informational) and domains (earth, sea, air, space and cyberspace); technological innovation such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and scam-jet propulsion and their disruptive effects on military and non-military power capabilities; the weakening of instances and mechanisms of collective security and security governance. The second includes emerging issues and challenges like the security effects of climate change, the exacerbation of competition for scarce natural resources extending into the global commons; the increasing influence of human networks and the consequent empowerment of non-state actors and individuals either as security providers or as spoilers; and, finally, the greater risks and high vulnerability deriving from the reliance of governments, corporation and societies at large on an ever-pervasive cybersphere with limited governance and accountability.

While the drivers of change mentioned above are not exhaustive, they provide an introductory overview of the factors shaping present and future trends in international security. These trends form the backdrop for this analysis of future global security trends, viewed through the lens of the Global South and Latin America specifically. Although the discussion will focus on certain regional security dynamics, particularly in Latin America, the broader goal is to highlight the interplay between regional and global security trends.

Given the purpose and the limits set for the present exercise, four drivers that emerge from the interplay of global and regional security developments will be addressed: a- the simultaneous strengthening of geopolitical rivalries and the weakening of collective security at the global and regional levels, complicating effective security governance at both levels ; b- rising insecurity resulting from a greater exposure to more sophisticated, precise and lethal conventional arms and the increasing reliance on a minimally governed cybersphere; c- higher political, economic and military vulnerability deriving from great dependence and asymmetries in sensitive areas such as digital technologies, satellite communication, positioning systems and cyber infrastructure, among others; d- the growing power and relevance of violent non-state actors, in particular those associated to organized crime in large urban areas and in spaces with none or limited presence of state security forces and institutions.

Even though each of these four aspects possesses idiosyncratic expressions and poses specific challenges to security policies domestically and internationally, there are important linkages between them, as both state and non-state actors in the realm of international security resort to the multiple possibilities of transnational interconnections provided by the material and technological infrastructure through which the flow of political, economic and social interactions across national borders take place. They were selected as they provide important political and analytical connections between broader systemic security concerns at the global level and those which are representative of countries and regions of the Global South.

1. Power politics is the name of the game! Stronger geopolitical rivalries, weaker collective security: the prominence of power balancing dynamics in fostering international security

The dispute for global hegemony overtly pursued by the United States and China represents an important departure from the three-decade-long period in which the pattern of power distribution in post-cold war international order was described as "transitional", "indefinite", "uni-multipolar', "non-polar" and several other expressions that tried to grasp the traits of a new security reality and the unfolding structure of world power. Even though some difficulty in conveying a more precise analytic depiction of the structure of the contemporary international order persists, some basic traits related to the quest for hegemony at the global level and to power disputes in different regions can be discerned for the present reflection. The United States, the remaining superpower from the Cold War, and China as challenging newcomer, are, undoubtedly the front runners in the current quest for global hegemony. A second layer in such dispute resembles the bipolarity of the Cold War times as it is constituted, on the one hand, by a former superpower, Russia, and, on the other, by Western European great powers (United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and other fellow NATO members) who strive to sustain their power status quo internationally by reasserting their opposing security concerns in their own immediate and regional strategic environments. A third layer brings together a very heterogeneous set of countries that have emerged, through different paths, as important sources of influence in the shaping of their respective security environments, having thus gained international visibility and influence on major powers' security policies and in the realm of multilateral security alliances and regimes. India, Turkey, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, South Africa and Brazil are examples of such countries. Each of these three layers holds its own geopolitical rivalries and is subject to the spilling over of rivalries from the remaining ones.

The fact that this security framework is largely defined by conflict dynamics within and between them shows that geopolitical rivalries have regained strength. The dispute between the United States and China for strategic prominence on the global stage projects itself in different regional settings, somehow forcing countries to take sides and exposing them to what can be named the "divided reliance dilemma". This dilemma arises when a country or region depends on two rival powers for critical resources—such as economic investment, military assistance, or technological capabilities—that are essential to its security and development. Such a dilemma affects the making of security and defence policies and foreign policy as a whole and might raise political cleavages within those realms domestically as well as regionally and internationally.

Geopolitical rivalries have been also exacerbated by intraregional tensions associated with greater activism of regional actors in the realms of security and defence in a strive for

self-reassertion of their respective security concerns with a direct impact on their neighbour-hood, with Iran and North Korea being prime examples this behaviour. Saudi Arabia, Turkey and India, though in very different contexts and in different degrees, can also be viewed through the same prism.

In response to these geopolitical rivalries, many states have opted to strengthen their deter-rence capabilities, which has become for many a proper and necessary means to foster and safeguard their major security and defence interests; for some , it has become a vital national strategic objective This growing reliance on power-balancing strategies has left little room for collective security initiatives, which are seen as less viable in a world dominated by power politics. As a result, the international security landscape has become increasingly fragmented, with countries focusing on enhancing their own security rather than pursuing cooperative approaches to address shared challenges.

The absence of political will and effective political conditions for great or regional powers to lead the creation or the reinvigoration of collective security mechanisms provides a strong indication that international security and its governance mechanisms will continue to rely on power-balancing strategies in the coming years. Security governance, in turn, will continue to be severely constrained or ultimately rendered inefficient or unfeasible. In such a case, the international security landscape will continue to be prone to instability at both levels.

2. Conventional armaments matter! Greater exposure to threats and vulnerabilities associated with technological dependence and the proliferation of more sophisticated, precise and lethal conventional armaments

The increasing reliance on power balancing as an approach to foster international security derives from and is reinforced by the impact of emerging disruptive technologies on warfare, which, in turn, contributes to deepening the gap in military capabilities between forefront runners in the global strategic competition and those positioned at subsequent layers of the international power hierarchy.

It is, therefore, no surprise that recent data on world military expenditures, arms production and transfer have evolved around a small group led by the United States whose military expenditure alone is, larger than the combined spending of the remaining top 9 spenders (China, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, Ukraine, France and Japan). At the same time, in the selected club of the top twenty largest arms-producing and military services

companies, fifteen or three-fourths, are American (9) and Chinese (6) and the remaining five are from Western Europe (4) and Russia (1).

Such an oligopolistic picture does not change if the club is enlarged to comprise the top 100: 67 per cent of them come from six countries (USA, China, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Russia). These data suggest that despite the dynamism of the global market concerning armaments and military services, basic and applied R&D and innovation concerning arms production will remain highly concentrated in a strong oligopolist structure. The picture is quite similar for international arms transfers: the 25 largest suppliers accounted for 98 per cent of the total volume of world exports, and the top 5—the United States, France, Russia, China and Germany—accounted for 75 per cent. In sharp contrast, the rank of the top 10 arms importers is constituted primarily by developing countries (India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Ukraine, Pakistan, Egypt and South Korea) located in strategically troubled regions. China, Japan and Australia, despite their different political, economic and strategic status quo in comparison to the others are also examples of countries concerned with the rise of their strategic and military profile.

However, global arms production and sales trends also show that there are opportunities for countries willing to strengthen their military capabilities due to either to their engagement in regional rivalries and armed conflicts or to their intent to improve their power profile regionally or internationally. Recent data on global arms acquisitions and transfers shows that there is an increasing demand among major arms importers for items that provide them with conventional deterrence capability such as advanced combat aircraft, uncrewed aircraft and cruise missiles. Due to their lower costs, the demand for uncrewed aircraft and cruise missiles has increased significantly.

Missile proliferation - cruise missiles in particular - has, therefore, become an issue of greater relevance in the agenda of international security. Their versatility, flexibility, lethality and affordability and the strategic advantages derived from these attributes, have made them the cornerstone of missile proliferation at present. More than fifty countries are known to be pursuing cruise missile capabilities at the present; among them, those regarded as regional powers (Brazil, South Africa, India, Saudi Arabia), and countries willing to change their power status quo such as Iran and North Korea.

At the same time, a growing challenge regarding the protagonists of missile proliferation concerns violent non-state actors. The possession of missiles by violent non-state actors is no longer subject to questioning and has in fact become commonplace knowledge as demonstrated by the conflicts in Yemen and the Gaza Strip. Other non-state actors such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, ISIS and the Taliban are also known for possessing significant arsenals of rockets and missiles. Concerns about missile capabilities of non-state actors refer not only to the possession of such a resource, but also to their access to technologies and inputs that might allow them to develop rockets and missiles of greater range, precision, and lethality in great quantities.

Therefore, the proliferation of conventional armaments and missiles poses important security challenges as it is closely related to the concentration of technological breakthroughs in a restricted number of countries with a direct impact on already unstable regional settings.

3. Greater risks and vulnerabilities lying ahead!
Continuing obstacles for security governance.

Technological advancements and innovation in several critical security realms have provided incentives and opportunities for state and non-state actors to perform more active roles in it, not only for their impact on warfare as such, but also for their positive externalities for the provision of proper conditions to address a diversified array of non-conventional security challenges. Despite such positive externalities, the worldwide diffusion of and reliance on advanced information and communication technologies has also paved the way for new forms of dependence and, therefore, for new sources of great risks and vulnerability for both state and non-state actors alike. Therefore, responses to the demands for governance in issue areas of an inherently transnational character, like cyberspace security, will be subject to the complex and often very slow interplay of the relative power of major stakeholders namely, states themselves, the giant tech companies, the wide array of service providers, corporations and civil society organizations, making it a politically sensitive and difficult undertaking. Consequently, the mismatch between real and impending needs of cyber governance and actual accomplishments in this direction leaves a great share of the concerns over emerging threats, risks and vulnerabilities associated with the cyberspace remain largely unattended, signalling that high levels of uncertainty and insecurity shall persist in the near and midterm future. The resilience of cyberinfrastructure at national levels to cyber threats shall reflect primarily the outcomes of national initiatives and developments partially shared internationally as geopolitical considerations tend to restrict eventual possibilities for political dialogue and greater multilateral cooperation.

4. The spread of violence and the new security spoilers: the growing relevance of violent non-state actors

The gradual increasing influence of violent non-state actors has been observed throughout the post-Cold War, having intensified over the past decade, concomitantly with the revaluation of non-state actors and threats and in line with the trends of a significant reduction of interstate conflicts and the increase of irregular and asymmetric ones. It is also in line with the gradual displacement of the State as the absolute referent of international security in favour of individuals and non-state actors, particularly those that manage to operate transnationally in the security realm. As they do so, violent non-state actors pose important security challenges as they defy state authority, fragile security governance structures and, eventually, even the tenets of great power politics. It is important to highlight that their emergence related to the rise of human security in the early twenties, in the agendas of multilateral security organizations, namely the United Nations, as well as in security policies at the national level and within civil society organizations in the area. It is, therefore, a global phenomenon, but it will be approached here from a regionally centred perspective as an intent to illustrate the interplay between global and regional security developments, as previously mentioned.

Studies on Latin American security usually point out that the region is a very stable region concerning interstate rivalries. It is geographically and politically distanced from major conflict scenarios. The last war in the region was fought by Peru and Ecuador in 1998 over a territory dispute. On the other hand, it is regarded as the most violent region in the world. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), violence associated with organized crime, drug trafficking, and gangs accounts for roughly 40% of total homicides in the world. Moreover, the region also contains 41 of the 50 most violent metropolises. Such extremely high indexes of violence are certainly related to widespread economic and social grievances and inequality, high levels of corruption and impunity, factors have domestic roots and that must be addressed primarily at the national level.

However, there is sound evidence that transnational organized crime has played a central role in the spread of violence throughout the region. Undoubtedly, organized crime associated with the traffic of illicit drugs, arms, human beings, wild species and minerals is a core driver of the violence perpetrated by non-state actors. However, besides organized crime, it must be noted that violent non-state actors related to terrorism and armed insurgence are still present in the region, even though with much less impact than in the late eighties and early nineties, but should not be disregarded in contexts of persisting political, economic and social instability and weak democratic governance as it is the case of Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Honduras and Nicaragua, to mention a few.

A very critical development concerning organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean is the simultaneous internationalization of several crime organizations like the Brazilian PCC (First Command of the Capital), the Venezuelan Tren de Arágua and the Mexican Siloá Cartel and the spread of organized crime throughout the Amazon region. While the first

trend accounts for the growing violence in several countries in Latin America deriving from disputes between criminal organizations for prominence over territory, logistics, markets and resources, the latter generates a very complex context in which criminal organizations have become deeply entangled with the traffic of illicit drugs, arms, human beings, wildlife, minerals and prostitution networks and, ultimately, environmental crimes like illegal mining, deforestation and timber trafficking with devastating effects not only over the environment but on local communities and, particularly on indigenous populations and on their territories.

The securitization of environmental issues in the Amazon in direct relation to the spread of organized crime challenges the ability of countries of the Amazon basin to set in motion joint coordination and cooperation initiatives across different issue areas, which becomes a critical endeavour due to the inexistence of a proper regional forum where the issue can be addressed from the perspective of the region itself.

As demonstrated by recent developments in Brazil, where a series of wildfires affected large shares of important biomes like the Amazon, the wetlands and the Brazilian savannah as well as sugarcane plantations in the state of Sao Paulo – the effects of climate change and extreme climatic events, like the severe drought the country faces, favour new forms of crime like what could be addressed as environmental vandalism, not necessarily articulated with organized crime but to a sort of political and social pathology whose roots are varied and profound. But there are mounting indications that still deserve further investigation that a great share of the recent wave of wildfire throughout Brazil could be politically motivated, which is suggestive of environmental blackmail perpetrated by crime organizations for political purposes. Therefore, rising uncertainties and insecurity associated to the disruptive effects of climate change and extreme climate events provide a favourable context for the expansion of crime organizations domestically and internationally and for their entanglement with environmental crimes, a trend that deserves to be closely watched in the coming years both in Latin America and other regions as well.

The emphasis on crime organizations does not necessarily mean that non-state violent actors related to terrorism and armed insurgence should be neglected. As mentioned above, even though they are much less prominent but still pose potential threats particularly where state authority is subject to overt contestation and political and security governance is, therefore, fragile.

Final Remarks

The intent to assess the trends shaping the future international security order brings about the challenge of articulating a heterogeneous set of security stakeholders, agendas and dynamics operating simultaneously at different levels. Seen from a Global South perspective, the short and midterm prospects of international security do not necessarily reflect specific concerns detached from those of the forefront players in this domain as there is not a clear dividing line among security challenges deriving from great power politics and those arising from and/or associated to concerns over global issues like cybersecurity, climate change, human security, transnational organized crime, international terrorism, health, multiple governance gaps.

However, international security will rely on power balancing strategies as there are strong driving forces operating and supporting such development (an overt dispute for global hegemony, geopolitical rivalries at the global and regional levels, technological breakthroughs in the realm of conventional armaments, a quest for the deterrence capabilities, higher military expenditures, the empowerment of violent non-state actors).

At the same time, important obstacles to the creation and/or reinvigoration of security governance are still in place. Among them, the crisis of multilateralism, the lack of political will to effectively reform and strengthen existing collective security regimes, an overall resistance at state security levels to deepen interdependence in critical areas for security and defence interests, great uncertainty in its engagements with numerous states, non-state actors and civil society in political dialogues that imply the willingness to accept an encompassing reconfiguration of their respective political, economic and normative power attributes in the benefit of a more stable and secure world order.

Therefore, the increasing reliance on power balancing strategies, the rush towards advanced conventional deterrence capabilities, the persistence of important political restraints for multilateral dialogue and cooperation on emerging transnational security issues thereby rendering effective security governance almost unattainable and, finally, the greater influence of violent non-state actors, are all key trends that will shape the future landscape of international security.

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