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The influence of military strength on national sovereignty in international relations

La influencia de la capacidad bélica sobre la soberanía nacional en las relaciones internacionales

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ABSTRACT. In international law, the doctrine states that countries are autonomous and sovereign. However, reality shows that relations between countries are often unequal. There is a proportional relationship between a country's military strength and its influence on international relations (diplomatic, economic, commercial, and political), depending on its capabilities of cooperation, subordination, conditionality, or confrontation with other countries. Here, the relations between the United States, the European Union, China, and Russia are analyzed, as well as the Latin American context. This analysis describes the influence of a country's available military strength on its national policies in the current context of the so-called gunboat diplomacy.

KEYWORDS: armed forces; defense; international law; international relations; national security; sovereignty

RESUMEN. En el derecho internacional, la doctrina declara que los países son autónomos y soberanos, pero la realidad muestra que las relaciones entre países no suelen ser igualitarias. Hay una relación proporcional entre la capacidad bélica de un país y su influencia en las relaciones internacionales (diplomáticas, económicas, comerciales y políticas), en función de sus posibilidades de cooperación, subordinación, condicionamiento o enfrentamiento con otros países. Aquí se analizan las relaciones entre EE. UU., la Unión Europea, China y Rusia, así como el contexto latinoamericano. Mediante este análisis, se evidencia la influencia de la disposición de capacidad bélica de un país con miras a su política internacional en el contexto actual de la llamada *diplomacia de las cañoneras*.

PALABRAS CLAVE: defensa; derecho internacional; fuerzas armadas; relaciones internacionales; seguridad nacional; soberanía

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Introduction

National security and defense are both essential and extraordinary factors in a state's ordinary functions, mainly because activities in this area have an impact that can be evaluated at the following two levels:

1. At the national level, they influence the national government's legitimacy in the eyes of its population and have an impact, whether positive or negative, on the national economy. National security is primarily related to political science because it surpasses a military or legal conception, linking it tightly to the very survival of a nation.
2. At the international level, they prompt military alliances, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). They generate significant industrial and technological development activities that sanction the establishment of blocks of countries according to specific interests.

The course of the Cold War allowed us to see, especially the United States and USSR's actions, that the *antagonistic blocks* that emerged in this context went beyond the diplomatic field to the economic, commercial, and cultural; they even led to the development of an international relations system.

The State's actions in defense and national security functionally legitimize it both before its population and, in the international arena, before other nations. These actions' impact can be explained in terms of concepts of the Theory of the State, according to which, defense and national security are developed at three normative levels.

1. *State Policy* mainly concerns the protection of national sovereignty and international relations with other states.
2. *Public policy* involves the actions carried out by the Armed Forces at an institutional level in the country, both in national security and defense, as well to support the population during national emergencies, especially in disaster situations. Here, the actions of the Armed Forces converge both in fulfilling a public function and in providing a public service.
3. *Government policies* correspond to the line of political and international management that each government assumes concerning the country's Armed Forces (Solarte, 2004).

National governments plan and execute decisions on these state aspects, which are characterized by the immediate, direct, and indirect effects that they generate in the international context. Any measure that involves a change in military operations can cause an immediate reaction in other countries. Especially countries with which

there is a tense relationship and may have diplomatic, commercial, or military factors that are interdependent, such as

1. Contradictory diplomatic relations, such as the relationship between the United States and Venezuela or the historical diplomatic tension and the trade embargo established against Cuba by the US. A particular issue that deserves analysis is the assessment of human rights between countries with diplomatic tensions; for instance, the relationship of the U.S. with Cuba, Venezuela, and even Colombia. In this last case, it should be noted that, despite the evidence of internal armed conflict, the United States did not carry out any negative diplomatic action against Colombia to directly and objectively tend to the population affected by the conflict. Although this text analyzes international relations to explain the context in which countries can establish diplomatic conditions to address various issues, it must be considered that this will depend on the objectives determined by each country in its government policies.
2. Trade or economic relations in which the more powerful country imposes an adverse condition on another country, such as economic sanctions. The most paradigmatic case is the U.S. trade blockade of Cuba (Liriano, 2005).
3. Relations involving territorial claims, as in the case of China and India, where China historically maintains a presence in the region of Kashmir, which has not yet been fully delimited, causing one country to object to the borderlines declared unilaterally by the other (Bouzas, 2011).

The upholding of this position is based on the theory expounded by Saynur Bozkurt. He explains that *diplomatic ties*, in essence, respond to a policy of meeting a country's requirements in the international context. Thus, countries develop a war capacity that can complement their diplomatic, commercial, and political actions. In this sense, Saynur describes the United States' international policy concerning access to energy sources to support its economy and position in the international arena (Saynur, 2013). This is a special case that allows for the analysis of this issue as a matter of current international law. In this matter, it is necessary to articulate several transversal axes, all of them subject to several conditions, among which the nations, political-economic alliances, national government interests, and the current economic, political, and territorial situation stand out.

This article expressly analyzes two very particular realities. First, it analyzes the developing relations between the United States, European Union, Russia, and China in terms of their military operations and capacity to influence the world in the context of international relations. Then, it analyzes the Latin American context, mainly

because the acquisition, renewal, and maintenance of armaments have shown a decreasing trend in recent decades.

A hermeneutic and qualitative methodological approach with a systemic focus allows this analysis of the two mentioned contexts based a descriptive, empirical, qualitative, and causal documentary analysis and the evaluation of international geopolitics. The main objective is to explain the method used by countries to establish their diplomatic relations using their war capacity.

Analysis of the international context considering the national military forces' operation level

At the end of 2019, the world's most powerful military countries put their new aircraft carriers into operation, China's CV-17 Shandong (Marcus, 2019), England's R-09 Prince of Wales (Galaxia Militar, 2019), and United States' CVN-77 Gerald R. Ford (Sputnik Mundo, 28 de marzo de 2019). It should be noted that as countries develop a strategy of international diplomacy, they also develop parallel methods that can eventually complement, support, or improve their capacity in international negotiations with other countries according to their war power (Horowitz, 2010).

The direct reference to this situation is based on the understanding of one country's exercise of military power over another, especially when political or trade relations are established; this is known as *gunboat diplomacy* (Cable, 1977), which generates bilateral negotiations subject to the imposition of this military power.

Gunboat diplomacy is the method by which countries with more powerful military forces pressure other countries at the time of negotiation to satisfy their own interests or those of their allies. This method has been modified according to the level of antagonism, thus driving the current use of "network diplomacy," which is nothing more than a strategy to *expose* a country's political image both positively and negatively. Thus, if the initial objectives are not reached by this means, the recourse of military intimidation becomes inevitable (Gavari & Rodríguez, 2015, p. 78).

The historical process, which drove the signing of the Harris Treaty in 1858 (Moreno, 1990, p. 23), is probably the most significant historical reference to explain this theory, given Japan's reaction to a superior military power that forced it to open its ports (and markets) to international trade. At that time, Japan was not only being conditioned by the United States; it was also militarily vulnerable to England, France, Holland, and Russia. Intervention by any of these countries would have led to colonization and, consequently, to the limitation of its sovereignty, not unlike the situation with China in the 19th century (De la Luz et al., 2005, p. 98).

Today, the context has changed significantly, sending a naval fleet or military force does not automatically imply a situation of domination of the country that is

being conditioned militarily. The countries in conflict have sufficient military power to carry out either an intervention or a military defense. However, they choose to adopt a strategy that generally seeks to avoid a situation of armed conflict.

A better reference for *gunboat diplomacy* can be the diplomatic and political methods that the world powers employ in the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, where the presence of American and European naval forces create constant tension with Iran (Giordano, 2002, p. 19). Some other contemporary references that can also be cited are the following:

- The dispatch of the U.S. naval fleet with three aircraft carriers to North Korea at the beginning of the Trump administration (Lendon, 2017). This situation was driven by the United States' need for a better negotiating margin against North Korea to have its consent to a new agreement on its nuclear policy (Woodward, 2018).
- The dispatch of two Russian Tupolev 160 nuclear bomber aircraft to Venezuela in 2019, in response to the U.S. pressure to intervene and overthrow the government of Nicolas Maduro (BBC Mundo, 2018). This action showed that Russia could mobilize war equipment in the subcontinent. The international policy executed by Vladimir Putin mitigated the pressure of South American countries on Maduro (Schoen & Roth, 2016, p. 40). These events also evidenced another issue, the lack of vision of South American countries regarding a regional security and defense situation, which was adversely increased when Unasur disintegrated in 2018.
- The approaching of the U.S. naval fleet to the Spratly Islands, despite China's protests that it was disputing this territory with other Asian countries (HispanTV, 2019). This action was carried out because of the constant expansion of China's war resources (Cliff, 2015, p. 4).
- The dispatch of a U.S. naval fleet to the Persian Gulf in May 2019 (Mars, 2019). This area, which has a high level of military force operability, is an agitated tense area prone to warfare interaction.

These are the most representative cases of the last two years. They show a model of interaction between countries with some level of opposition that may involve hostile actions. The description of these cases makes it possible to distinguish four levels of interaction that characterize the new approach in which *international relations* are developed in these countries, following the historical tradition of the *law of war* (Detter, 2013). These levels of interaction are described further to expand on this description.

First level of interaction: subordination

In this first level, there is no mechanism for dialogue or negotiation. Instead, one country militarily overrides the other, which may even translate into the slight military intimidation that the dominant country needs to exercise power over the subordinate. North American influence in the Latin American region is an objective example of this level (Ceceña, 2001, p. 7).

Second level of interaction: confrontation

The second level involves the participation of two countries in a situation of direct or indirect warfare. It develops based on what David Lake describes as the “new order” in international relations. Particularly, when one country defines “strategic objectives” that are opposed to the interests and sovereignty of another country (Lake, 2009). In this case, a country carries out military actions that provoke a military reaction by the attacked. Frequently, this reaction to repel a threatening act can affect the provoking country with greater disproportion.

The Middle East is a good representation. Without wishing to influence the legitimacy of an international condition or position, Israel’s political discourse before the UN has always been that they are *taking actions to defend* its sovereignty in the face of aggression from neighboring countries. The countries that have carried out military interventions against Israel, on the other hand, have justified their actions by the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories (Amnistía Internacional, 2014, p. 8).

Third level of interaction: intimidation and military tension without war

The third level involves the interaction of two countries with equal or similar military forces that do not enter into a warlike confrontation based on the discourse of preserving diplomatic relations in the area of international law. However, in essence, this discourse underscores *restraint* in the performance of military acts.

Confrontations in the new millennium have been exceptional. Both Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) had a pattern, although similar. They were executed in the Middle East, and military intervention was established in a *joint* manner coalition. The United States’ superiority in the face of the Soviet world’s weakness at that time (Sánchez, 2009, p. 58) is different from what is now; this explains why similar military interventions have not been carried out in Syria, Venezuela, or North Korea.

In the current context, this proves to be extremely illustrative. It explains some situations in which, despite everything, no military or political confrontations with apparent economic or commercial consequences have taken place, for instance, in the following circumstances.

1. The theft (Riley & Elgin, 2013) or use of “reverse” technology based on the prioritization of research (Jun, 2018), for example, the cases of Russia and China concerning the weapons produced in the USA. This situation also has an opposing example in the design of the American F-35B aircraft, based on the Russian Yak-141 aircraft, which pioneered the use of VTOL (vertical take-off and landing) technology.
2. Cases of unauthorized nuclear weapon production in Iran (Sierra, 2006, p. 112) and North Korea since 2003 (Carpintero, 2010, p. 264), where no Western country has executed any level of military intervention, and all international action has been limited to the imposition of trade sanctions.
3. Cases of non-intervention in areas of undeclared conflicts, such as in India and Pakistan. The lack of political, diplomatic, or economic intervention by the most powerful countries in the world in the face of permanent conflict between two countries with high military potential is represented in this context.
4. Similar to the previous point, Western countries have failed to carry out military actions or intimidation against Russian military interventions carried out in the Crimea, Ukraine, and Georgia (Colomer & Flores, 2002, p. 209) or when China occupied Tibet before the 2008 Olympics.
5. Cases in which the national crisis gives way to the violation of human rights, and there is no intervention or an intention to formally mediate the national problem, as is the case in Africa, Syria, and Venezuela.

Fourth level of interaction: military intervention

At this level, none of the above three interactions apply. In this case, a military intervention is triggered by war or *casus belli*, as stated by Lake and Morgan (1997), when a “new order” is generated in the international arena that justifies the action based on *homeland security* objectives of the country that is executing the military intervention. This was the most common situation before the creation of the United Nations at the end of the Second World War.

Military diplomacy contingent on the dialogue between countries

According to the previous, diplomatic and military relations between nations are subject to various conditions, especially when the countries in conflict evaluate their war potential. In this sense, countries can find themselves in one of these three situations:

1. Countries undergoing military tension that have significant nuclear and conventional warfare capability. In this case, the following examples can be identified:
 - a. Russia (Fazio, 2015, p. 234) and China (Ali, 2010, p. 5) concerning NATO and the U.S.
 - b. India and Pakistan (Schofield, 2005).
 - c. North Korea and the U.S. (Chomsky, 2016).

In these cases, countries ponder the situational context and choose to generate a situation of *status quo ante bellum*, even when the recording of the evidence could lead to a much more complicated situation to handle in the diplomatic arena. An example is the case of Sergei Skripal, a [counter] spy on the Russian side. Although this case provoked the reaction of the U.S. and England, only *economic penalties* were imposed, and no military action was carried out (France 24, 2018).

2. Countries with internal armed conflict whose national problems are described as a *domestic issue*, and, therefore, do not represent a binding condition in terms of diplomacy or military pressure. Examples of this are:
 - a. The internal armed conflict in Colombia, which has been going on for more than fifty years and is likely to continue because the Peace Agreement was only established with only one of the guerrilla groups (Sierra-Zamora, 2018).
 - b. The armed conflict in Peru (Bermúdez, 2012, p. 9) against Sendero Luminoso (1980-1992) and the Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (1984-1997).
3. Countries in internal armed conflict that are not a priority in the international policies of the military powers, as in the following cases:
 - a. Venezuela's humanitarian crisis.
 - b. The civil war in Syria.
 - c. The civil war in the Central African Republic.
 - d. The civil war in South Sudan.
 - e. The civil war in Yemen.

National autonomy in terms of war capacity

Countries implement *international policies* according to their diplomatic, economic, trade, political, and military capabilities. Thus, each government establishes, according to its priorities, which element to highlight before other countries (Lake & Morgan, 1997). To analyze this, we can point out the following conditions:

1. The United States exercises diplomatic, economic, commercial, political, and military influence over other countries, without recognized opposition or rejection. Its economic, commercial, political, and military power is so superior that China cannot exploit the United States' *international debt*, on a discretionary basis, because it would affect its own economy (Sandri, 2019).
2. Russia and China each exert diplomatic, economic, commercial, political, and military influence globally. Although individually, their influence is on a smaller scale than the North American, together, they have been able to neutralize it. The most representative case occurred during the Venezuelan crisis. That is, the Russian's dispatch of nuclear bomber planes to Caracas and China's criticism of North American pressure, driven mainly by the protection of the capitalization interest yield from the government of Nicolas Maduro's debt in its favor. As a differentiating element, China is developing its New Silk Road, which excludes the U.S. from the new international trade context. Meanwhile, it is also developing military technology to end its dependence on Russia.
3. England, France, Germany, and Italy also wield worldwide diplomatic, economic, commercial, political, and military influence, however, at a lower scale than the United States, Russia, and China.

Faced with these circumstances, other countries act according to their own conditions, thus provoking a series of situations that automatically change the landscape of international relations. In recent years, Turkey created a situation of tension between the United States and Russia over the acquisition of the S-400 Integrated Missile System (Mañueco, 2019). This action led to the *purging* of the countries of the F-35 program (Schmidt, 2019) and will probably lead to the renewal of the Turkish air fleet with Russian planes.

Historically, China and Russia have influenced the conflict between Pakistan and India. Proof of this is that Russia rents a nuclear submarine to India (TRT, 2019), while China has fighter jet production programs with Pakistan (Defensa Nacional y del Mundo, 2019). This situation is the most representative of the joint actions carried out in the military field in the area.

This balance of *military power* is continuously changing; mainly, because countries such as the U.S., Russia, and China implement military cooperation programs with India and Pakistan so that these countries can meet their war needs autonomously. Because this requires significant financial and technological resources, strategic cooperation is fundamental and a priority, especially when the *enemy of the enemy* is a friend.

In this sense, by jointly producing JF-17 aircraft, China and Pakistan have prompted India to acquire Rafale aircraft from France to maintain the balance in the region, which usually experiences air battles (Sputnik Mundo, 8 de octubre de 2019). It also makes it possible to project the future expansion of the arms race in the area and, with it, the pressures of the most powerful countries — like the United States, Russia, and China — on how the military autonomy of these countries is developing.

An example of this is the U.S. criticism of Pakistan for using F-16s outside the agreed area of action (BBC Mundo, 27 de febrero de 2019), which resulted in Indian aircraft battles in Kashmir in February 2019 (BBC Mundo, 6 de enero de 2019). These criticisms may lead to a limitation in the provision of maintenance or spare parts to the F-16 fleet by the U.S.

National sovereignty and the ability to respond to war requirements

The operational needs of a country's military forces depend largely on its context. Therefore, this context becomes essential to a country's *war capacity* based on a) its international policy of intervention in other latitudes, and (b) its national defense and security needs, as well as other requirements imposed on it by both state and public policies determined by national governments.

The most powerful countries in the world use their war capacity to satisfy their needs and interests; this guarantees them a positive margin for negotiation based on the intimidation they can exert, especially when the counterpart does not have the same war potential. This factor does not have an immediate impact on international relations, but it does develop in a *parallel and complementary* way to political, economic, and trade negotiations.

Because of this condition, countries, depending on their war capacity, assume certain positions.

- Countries that are self-sufficient in terms of their operational capacity and the provision of war supplies. This is the only level at which the United States can be placed because it has an institutional budget that objectively exceeds the rest of the world.
- Countries that are self-sufficient in an operational capacity, but conditioned on the international side. Countries such as Russia, China, England, Germany, France, Italy, Australia, and Canada, as well as the countries that are part of NATO, make up this group and may be conditioned by North American pressure. There is a subdivision in this block. As Russia and China increase their war potential, other European countries limit their op-

erational capacity, mainly because of the high budget involved. The English case is the most representative because its operational limitation is linked to the United States' international policy. Therefore, economic effects weakened its war capacity (Axe, 2016).

- Countries with military capacity and technology that guarantee the protection of their sovereignty autonomously. India, Japan, Turkey, Egypt, South Korea, Israel, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Switzerland, and Brazil are part of this group. These countries have sufficient military capacity to protect their sovereignty, thanks to the context of their international relations with neighboring countries.
- Countries dependent on war inputs, with a level of operation following their needs and internal policies. The countries of Latin America are at this level, mainly because they do not seek to have an offensive warfare capacity. Therefore, they are able to purchase, renew, and decommission arms according to their internal needs. It should be noted that the war capacity of the Armed Forces of countries such as Peru and Colombia, where internal armed conflict has been registered, has not been proportional to the military attack capacity of Sendero Luminoso or the FARC-EP, for example. This situation gives way to the *smuggling* of Russian-made weapons in these countries, events that have not been reported through the official national diplomatic channels.
- Countries with insufficient war capacity. Countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and the countries of Central America represent this context.
- Countries with no war capacity. Costa Rica is the only country in the world that fits this case. It guarantees its sovereignty through its international policy.
- Countries without war capacity.

Andrei Martyanov expands on these categories by describing a *balanced ratio* between a country's war capacity and its ability to establish international relations with other countries. This evidences the impact of the operational capacity of a country's military forces on its international policy (Martyanov, 2019).

Through this classification, it is possible to show a proportional relationship between *the sovereignty* of a country and its *war capacity*, as countries that are not part of the first two blocks described may be conditioned in their international policies. A graphic example of this situation was recorded in 1982 when Margaret Thatcher pressured François Mitterrand to make France surrender the secret codes of the Exocet missiles that Argentina had in its arsenal and used to sink the frigate HMS Sheffield in the Falklands War (Infobae, 2005).

The French military codes were delivered because of England's threat to use a nuclear bomb in Cordoba (in the middle of the Argentine territory). The previous shows the power of *intimidation* of the war capacity of one country over another. Although the threat was not directly to its sovereignty or territory, England managed to affect France's war material export capacity.

The Latin American reality

The last armed conflict (undeclared war) between countries in Latin America was between Peru and Ecuador in 1995. The turnout was favorable for the former, which despite registering several casualties in its air fleet, managed the withdrawal of Ecuadorian troops from Peruvian territory. It is presumed that this country had Argentine military support (Saad, 2005, p. 77). Weapon sales from Argentina to Ecuador at the height of the conflict (El Mundo, 2011) provoked a Peruvian diplomatic reaction. It reminded Carlos Menem of the Peruvian Mirages provided to his country during the Falklands War, as well as Argentina's status as *guarantor country* of the Peace and Boundary Treaty between Peru and Ecuador.

As a result, Peru renewed its air fleet by replacing the SU-22 aircraft with the Mig-29 aircraft of the latest technology, causing Chile to acquire second-hand F-16s. The military balance based on war potential was again preserved.

However, many years have transpired since then. Therefore, France and Spain have been offering Dassault Rafale aircraft to Latin America, and state-of-the-art ships to Colombia and Peru. To date, Peru has not yet decided to renew its air fleet; instead, it has extended the life span of its Mirage 2000, Mig-29, and Su-25 aircraft (Mejía, 2017).

Chile, in turn, is no longer the arms buyer of the 1980s and 1990s, nor does it produce weapons on the same scale. Its operational capacity has been principally limited by the repeal of the *Copper Law*, which allowed it access to sources of financing for the acquisition of war material from the sale of copper in the international market (Gestión, 2019).

Similarly, Argentina and Mexico are no longer the military powers of the past. They have established minimum levels of military operability, primarily through their governments' direct actions. Argentina even registers a level of deficit that makes it very difficult to raise its military operational capacity to the level of countries like Peru or Chile (García, 2019).

Venezuela has renewed its air fleet by replacing the American F-16s with Su-30s, mainly because it could not access other types of weaponry other than from Russia or its political allies. However, the high cost involved in this acquisition has produced a

negative economic impact, to the point that Russia demanded payment of the credits generated, which were paid with interest (Reuters, 2019).

Brazil has renewed its air fleet with the Swedish Gripen, given a *transfer* of technology, which no other arms supplier offered (Witker, 2014). It is also in the process of renewing its marine fleet and producing technology in the military field; this has enabled it to propose the United States its incorporation into NATO as a *strategic military ally country*, despite its lack of possibilities (Blasco, 2019). The category of *strategic military ally* surpasses Colombia as a *global partner* of NATO since 2018. For Brazil, this would mean *access* to war material without significant complications.

Brazil has proposed this alliance with the United States, driven by its interest to ensure significant influence beyond the Latin American region, following the failure of the BRICS — the association of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa— (Larionova & Kirton, 2018), due to the autonomy of Russia, China, and India from their projections. It has pursued this objective despite the setback of the Lava Jato problem, the most extensive anti-corruption investigation in Brazil (Bringel & Domingues, 2018).

Conclusions

There is a *balanced ratio* between a country's war capacity and its influence in the field of international relations, which allows a better appreciation of the interaction between nations when establishing their economic, commercial, political, and diplomatic relations. A new international context has emerged. In it, international relations are not only subordinated to traditional diplomatic issues, but also to the actions that can eventually be carried out by countries with higher and better war capacity, in particular, to access *resources* that they consider strategic. Consequently, other essential elements are relativized or relegated to the background, such as the attention to social problems that affect human rights in a given country.

Similarly, the level of *autonomy* in the capacity to produce war material has a major impact on how a country develops its international policy, especially when there is economic, commercial, or political pressure from neighboring countries with more considerable influence.

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