

POLITICAL TURNS AND PERCEPTIONS IN THE FOREIGN POLICIES OF ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL (2003-2019)

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Abstract

In the evolution of contemporary international politics, ideological turns are important factors that affect the resetting of governments' external agendas and of intra-regional and extra-regional ties. All of them are affected by the worldviews of political leaders who occupy a prominent place in governments and by the types of leadership that presidents choose to have in the exercise of their functions. This prompts us to analyse and reflect on the forms of international insertion South American countries in the regional, continental and global scene based on the perceptions of these leaders. The challenge is to analyse the pre-existing and emerging perceptions between Argentina and Brazil in the period 2003-2019 and how they shaped the regional integration processes. At the same time, this paper examines their trends based on the operational milieu, that is, according to the international and regional context and the evaluation of integrationist alternatives. The hypothesis is that the changes that took place in the operational milieu were a determining factor in the setting of the psychological milieu; and that the resetting of the agenda regarding regional integration shows both a change in perceptions and an effort to adapt to external and internal political turns. Thus, among the various existing perceptions, we highlight as the most relevant three ideal models/types that move towards two extremes to achieve a third that synthesizes them: the strategic alliance; nationalist-military thought (or traditional suspicion); and Mutually Assured Trust (MAT). The creation of concepts such as the MAT implies advancing in a relational model that removes uncertainty from the bilateral relationship.

Keywords

Political Turns, Perceptions, Foreign Policy, Argentina, Brazil

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I. Introduction

The year 2003 was a turning point in world politics. The invasion of Iraq marked the relations of the Middle East with the world, the renewal of the alliance between the United States and the United Kingdom and, necessarily, the redefinition of the external agenda of the European Union (Paredes Rodríguez 2013; Martínez 2019; de Castro Ruano 2015). In the South of the world, political processes also began to redefine themselves during the first decade of the 21st century. Starting with the regional electoral cycle that began in 1998 with the triumph of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, the processes were characterized as a 'turn to the left', 'progressivism', 'rise of the pink tide', 'post-neoliberalism', 'neo-populism', etc. (Panizza 2006, Moreira 2017, Dubesset 2017). A decade later, the debate gained new vigour from the results of the electoral cycles in which political leaders labelled from the right were triumphing, who are averaging their terms of office in the final years of this second decade of the 21st century.

This double reactivation of the ideological debate makes us rethink the political path of the governments of South America, and gives us a time frame. The governments that inaugurated the new century - Kirchner in Argentina, Lula in Brazil, Chávez in Venezuela, Vázquez in Uruguay, Morales in Bolivia - were perceived by the academic community as representatives of a shift to the left (Pereyra Doval and Lorenzini 2019; Lesgart and Souroujon, 2008; Dabène, 2012). From 2015 onwards, the electoral results - Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Chile - invite us to think about the emergence of a new political cycle, based on the advance of right-wing political forces through various mechanisms - electoral, institutional and para-constitutional victories, including a coup in Bolivia³ - as well as the growing role that these actors play in the social and political opposition (Middlebrook, 2000; Beltrán, 2005; Anselmi 2017).

In the evolution of contemporary international politics, ideological turns (right-centre right- centre-centre-left-left) are important factors that affect the (re)setting of the governments' external agendas, and of intra-regional and extra-regional ties. All of them

¹ This article is the result of research leading to the award of the post-doctoral degree in International Relations, awarded by the National University of Rosario (Argentina).

² Article translated by Carolina Peralta.

³ The different references to Coups of a different nature in this work refer, in general terms, to a change of government operated by violating constitutional norms (Borja, 1997).



are affected by the worldviews of political leaders who occupy a prominent place in governments and by the types of leadership that presidents choose to have in the exercise of their functions. This prompts us to analyse and reflect on the forms of international insertion of South American countries in the regional, continental and global scene based on the perceptions of these leaders⁴. In this sense, the turns that have taken place in South America from 2003 until now mean not only a change in the political aspect, but also in what Jervis (1976) called the psychological and operational milieu. That is, the world as seen by an actor (psychological milieu) and the setting in which politics are carried out (operational milieu). Thus, the thinking of policy makers contains complex information and patterns, such as beliefs, values, experiences, and concepts; at the same time, a specific context operates. Therefore, the perception consists of the sum of images, beliefs and intentions of an actor according to a specific situation. The perception that the political classes have about the role of the nation impel a State to have a specific type of foreign policy.

Based on this, the challenge is to analyse the pre-existing and emerging perceptions between Argentina and Brazil in the period 2003-2019 and how they shaped the regional integration processes. Thus, the bilateral relationship between Brazil and Argentina, South American integration and the relationship between ideology and foreign policy are our object of study. We also examine its trends based on the operational milieu, that is, on the international and regional context, the redefinition of the place traditional partners occupy on the agenda and the evaluation of integrationist alternatives. The hypothesis is that the mutations that took place in the operational milieu were a determining factor in shaping the psychological milieu; and that the resetting of the agenda regarding regional integration shows both a change in perceptions and an effort to adapt to external and internal political turns. Thus, among the various existing perceptions, we highlight as the most relevant three ideal models/types that move towards two extremes to achieve a third that synthesizes them: the strategic alliance; nationalist-military thought (or traditional suspicion); and the Mutually Assured Trust. These three perceptions coexist in the same historical moments, but they also overlap each other, being able to identify the most outstanding in each cycle. We also affirm that, despite signs of mistrust, the last two models were the ones that prevailed in the construction of the foreign policy of the two countries under study and that suspicion increases the more to the right the ideologies of the governments are.

At this point, two clarifications are worth making. The first is that our intention is not to understand specific foreign policies, but to find general patterns of interaction. The second is that, according to Jervis (1976), there is no way to determine perceptions exactly, therefore, we delineate these three different models or ideal types. The most general theoretical framework is constructivism, since we agree that the roles are delimited from the perceptions - dominant interpretations - that Others have of us and

⁴ Two issues should be clarified. The first is that, in this text, there is an absence of discussion of the role of the economic elites of the two countries. While realising that it is a central piece to explain the positions and definitions of foreign policy, as well as the perception and actions of the executive powers, it exceeds the objective of this work. In this regard, we recommend reading González Bustamante, 2016; Donatello, 2015; Diniz et. al, 2012. The second is that the lack of capacity of the ministries of Foreign Affairs (particularly Itamaraty) in decision-making will also be noted; this is also a deliberate decision of the author regarding the objective of the text. However, we recommend reading Pereyra Doval, 2013; Schenoni and Ferrandi Aztiria, 2014; Rizzo, 2012.



vice versa; that is, our actions towards Others are planned from and limited by the perception that one has of that Other. In this context, perceptions end up playing a central role in the decisions about political structures. The way the current ruler perceives reality and the scenario where he is immersed will be decisive in the choice of the external action to follow. Therefore, we argue that perceptions are the fundamental variable for the formulation of foreign policy measures. This is where our objective derives from.

As can be seen, one of the main assumptions is that perception is closely related to the design of policies. On the other hand, the creation of concepts such as that of Mutually Assured Trust supposes advancing in a relational model that removes uncertainty from the bilateral relationship. We believe that the past, present, and future of Argentine-Brazilian relations demand a permanent categorical effort to account for them. As Deleuze (2007) put it, the task of thinking about the reality that involves us is nothing more than a permanent creation of concepts that not only explain but are reality itself.

Detailing and conceptualizing the near future of the Argentina-Brazil relationship, its environment, and also the South American integration-concertation, in terms of Mutually Assured Trust, arises from this idea. Thus, it is necessary to define not only the model of bilateral and regional relations but also to advance a discussion that involves approaching common proposals of a global order. To do this, first, and based on the concept of strategic alliance, we will describe the bilateral relationship; second, according to militaristic thinking, we will emphasize the latest political turn and how it affected the binomial; finally, we create the concept of Mutually Assured Trust to demonstrate that the increased institutionalization of regional schemes confers predictability to the bilateral relationship. This work favours an Argentine vision on the Argentina-Brazil approach. However, we will support the hypotheses with bibliography on the subject produced in Brazil.

II. Strategic alliance

Before starting with this section, two clarifications should be made. First of all, this section contains data from various surveys carried out among the population. The main source is the research programme "Argentine Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Defence" (CARI 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010), which is a series of surveys involving the population and Argentine leaders regarding the country's international relations. They are used for purely instrumental purposes and as indicators of the perception of just the political elites (specifically the executive powers). Second, it is not unknown that the term strategic alliance officially emerged from the signing of the Declaration of Rio de Janeiro in 1997 by Presidents Cardoso and Menem. However, in this paper we argue that the nineties were not relevant in terms of bilateral relations with Brazil since the importance of Argentina's political "carnal relations" with the United States did not give room for greater contacts with other countries, except for the rapprochement to Brazil in economic and commercial terms - (Cervo, 2000; Russell and Tokatlian, 2011). As Russell and Tokatlian (2011, pp. 289-290) state "it was never about equivalent relations, no matter how much the official discourse presented them in this way; the alliance with the United States had a political-strategic character, while the link with Brazil was considered economically necessary but politically inconvenient".



Thus, this second perception is based on the consolidation of the models drawn up by the executive powers in both countries as of 2003 and on an effort made by the Brazilian government to act as both a mediator and a “benefactor partner” of the region. In this sense, we will separate the strategic alliance, which implies an exclusively bilateral relationship, from the solidarity association characterized by unilateral Brazilian or multilateral actions led by Brazil.

Regarding the strategic alliance, it was in the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Lula da Silva that this bilateral friendship began to strengthen, regardless the rapprochement in relations from the mid-eighties and the implementation of MERCOSUR in the nineties (Lessa, 2010; Gomes Saraiva and Briceño Ruiz, 2009; Pereyra Doval, 2014). Although the concept of strategic alliance is somewhat vague and generalized, we understand it as “(...) a type of interstate relationship which, for various reasons and factors, is distinct in terms of consideration and importance from the rest of the bilateral relationships that make up the diplomatic universe of a country” (Cortés & Creus, 2009, p. 120). In other words, the bilateral relationship established or announced by Néstor Kirchner at the beginning of the new millennium would give more importance to Brazil as a privileged partner than to any other country.

It is a significant fact that part of the campaign for the ballot in the 2003 presidential elections was the meeting between Kirchner and Lula in the Planalto Palace, where both reaffirmed their position in favour of the integration process and the bilateral relationship. At the same time, the Brazilian president reinforced this gesture of receiving a ‘candidate’ through football hints that marked his opposition to Kirchner’s then opponent, the neoliberal Carlos Menem.

In a way, the meeting showed that Kirchner was going to follow the same direction Lula was taking in Brazil. This was very important for the population since, in general, according to the CARI surveys, Argentina was considered to have lost international presence, while Brazil was considered to be the Latin American country that was going to play the most important role in the world. Therefore, opinion leaders and the general population considered that regional integration should be the most relevant topic for the government regarding foreign policy -90% of opinion leaders and 77% of the general population considered it important for Argentina to be part of the MERCOSUR-.

The latter was strengthened when Brazil became the first destination abroad for the elected Argentine president and, above all, after the signing of the Buenos Aires Consensus a few months later, as opposed to the Washington Consensus. The new consensus meant several things: the collapse of the paradigm of the 1990s; a supposed ideological convergence between both governments; and, in the Argentine case, a return to the Peronist Third Position and also to a theoretical position that reveals an updated version of the Autonomy Doctrine of Rosario-born Juan Carlos Puig with a more liberal key: relational autonomy. The latter needed a trusted ally and Nestor Kirchner leaned towards his immediate neighbour. This was attested by the subsequent signatures of the Copacabana Act and the Rio Consensus.

The strategic alliance was reaffirmed on countless occasions and was transferred to the subsequent government. It seems that the symbiotic relationship established by Néstor and Lula, based on ideological convergence, had a pattern of continuity between Cristina



and Dilma, now based on a question of gender and human rights policy (Vitale, 2014; Rivarola and Moscovich, 2018).

This perception is based on some indicators that have their origin in the Latin American left or the neo-populism that emerged in the 21st century. The first thing to say is that these governments are not so much on the left as they are opponents of the neoliberal discourse of the previous decade and the havoc that neoliberalism caused in the countries of the region. In any case, the ideological base was the platform for the symbiosis between the governments of this side of Latin America, of which Lula and Kirchner were important exponents. As we will see later, the most important milestones of institutionalization of integration schemes such as Mercosur and UNASUR emerged during their leadership.

III. An increasingly present history, military nationalist thought

This first perception derives from some deep tendencies that still prevail. It is a minority but growing position within Brazil, and also in Argentina, especially since the rise of Jair Bolsonaro. It responds to certain sectors linked to the old nationalism and to the national Armed Forces since the middle of the last century, and is based on a historical interpretation of geographical disputes not properly settled since the dissolution of the Spanish-Portuguese empire. Thus, a direct heir of the Portuguese empire allied to the then hegemonic power, Great Britain, is observed in Brazil. On the other hand, the idea of Argentina as the child of a fractured nation, after independence from Spain, is insisted upon. Historical continuity places Brazil in times of national independence as an ally of the new regional leader, the United States, and Argentina as a counterweight allied of Great Britain in the southern hemisphere (Bernal Meza, 1999; Russell & Tokatlian, 2011).

This perspective, in short, saw the other country as an enemy of national interests and, therefore, as an ally of the powers that threatened the destiny of a state with large-scale international status. As is logical in a thought anchored in objective dimensions of power (geography, demography, etc.), integration was perceived as part of Brazil's clear imperial intention, in addition to taking advantage of Argentina.

The belief is still present in those heirs of what is called military thought. This exegesis argues that Latin American integration does not have to do with a historically necessary integration or with the new conditions of the global economy, or a partnership of solidarity. Rather, it is due to a historical project of expansion and consolidation of Brazilian hegemony in Latin America.

It must also be pointed out that both the academic and political circles, which are the platform of all parties with electoral presence, deny this thought. The basis of this denial is a triple criticism that comes from different places. The first criticism is that militaristic thinking preaches a model of imperialism or Brazilian hegemony that lies outside the structuring of the current international order, something like an old fashioned thought (Lanús, 1984). The second criticism is linked to the theoretical thinking of democracy, which maintains that the consolidation of the democratic system in the region annuls, in both countries, the categories of thought the international and especially the regional scene was approached with. In other words, the rise in the agenda of soft power and democratization builds cross-border links that make it impossible to think of geographic



imperialism (O'Donnell, 1994). At the same time, there is a general discrediting of this thought, considering it linked to military governments. The third and last criticism is based on the fact that the advance of integration describes new economic actors that have transnational interests, which would make it impossible to think of the relationship in traditional militaristic terms (Escudé, 1992, 1995). However, this denial does not prevent old perceptions from having been definitively annulled, with the clear danger that they may become evident in the turbulence of the current binational scenario. Particularly at regional level, the crisis that the Mercosur is going through, the replacement of UNASUR by PROSUR and the emergence of more lax regional bodies such as the Lima Group (Van Klaveren 2018; Caetano and Sanahuja 2019; Birle 2018), generate some questions about the place that integration and consensus-building occupy on the agenda of the governments of the region. International relations at continental level seem to have acquired a new profile after the presidential elections in the United States, which Donald Trump won. The redefinition and redirection of the ties of various South American governments with the United States can also be approached based on the indications, the decisions and the positions adopted in the negotiations on free trade in the different bilateral ties.

Therefore, despite the fact that the conflict hypotheses have been deactivated since the re-democratization, it cannot be ignored that this type of perceptions exist in both national leaderships. Thus, there is a collective unconscious as present as in the past that will continue to think of an imperialist Brazil and a counterweight Argentina, respectively.

IV. The moment of Trust: uncertainty about the future, between fear and love

Before Bolsonaro - which changes everything - the extensive list of gestures and political events produced in the last decade and a half (even with Temer) would enable an analysis in terms of the continuity of such scenarios. In short, why suspect a possible political change in Brazil regarding the Region? Why revive the suspicions of old nationalism still present in the imaginary of the Argentine elites, if the strategic alliance and solidarity cooperation refute such prophecies? Our response aims to consolidate perceptions of the present by suggesting the reduction of uncertainty caused by a global scenario in profound change. Given this, perhaps as an upward leap, but without ceasing to acknowledge the contradictions, it seems interesting to advance the need to inaugurate a new moment in bilateral relations: integration and cooperation as Mutually Assured Trust (MAT).

The proposal to inaugurate a relationship model based on what we call MAT aims to recover contradictory perceptions - double standard - of the past and project them into the future to act in the present. Thus, the MAT supposes advancing in a relational model that removes uncertainty from the bilateral relationship. A controlled association supported by mutual trust and deployed in a set of legal and political tools within the integrationist and cooperative process. The past, present, and future of Argentine-Brazilian relations demand a permanent categorical effort to account for them. As Deleuze (2007) would say, the task of thinking about the reality that involves us is nothing more than a permanent creation of concepts that not only explain but are also



reality itself. Defining the near future of the Argentina-Brazil relationship and with it also the South American integration-concertation, in terms of MAT arises from this task.

It is about generating trust in the other through the institutional strengthening of bilateral or collective instances. It is an agreement in which both are constrained to avoid problems in the future, in such a way that they both know that the other is not going to break unilaterally - or at least it will have high costs if it does. Thus, trust is generated in the link regardless of who governs.

Accordingly, the MAT: proposes predictability regardless of the political stance; it is a pragmatic concept that requires, paradoxically, a joint look at bilateral/regional priorities; it can establish cooperation frameworks on sensitive issues (e.g., water resources or nuclear or defence agreements). In short, it proposes establishing state policies at regional level.

The problem today is that in "illiberal" democracies there is an inversely proportional relationship between the construction of the MAT at institutional level and the tightening of bilateral relations that threaten these instruments. Trust is a category in common and widespread use. It develops into a common term to characterize various relational models. In the field of international relations, it has also been much used. Studies linked to regional or global security analysis find in trust a way to account for a set of preventive relationships. The multiple reinsurance of trust - through balance or agreement - increases the prospects for peace between nations.

To see -in institutional terms- which governments generated trust in the relationship and which did not, we compiled some institutionalizing milestones⁵ of UNASUR, from its immediate antecedents to its disappearance in 2018. Some of them were created by the South American Community of Nations (2004), the South American Energy Council (2007), UNASUR at the Brasilia Summit (2008), the South American Defence Council and the South American Health Council (2008), and the South American Council for Infrastructure and Planning - before IIRSA - (2009), among others. The institutional framework generated in UNASUR when defining its different levels of operation, and especially the role assigned to its different sectoral councils, account for the diversity of fields of action considered necessary for an effective advance of South American integration. Regardless of the abandonment of member states (especially Argentina and Brazil), UNASUR has played a major role as a space for dialogue, political mediation and definition of common positions by the region, in situations such as: separatist attempts in Bolivia; emergency due to the earthquake in Haiti; the attempted coup in Ecuador; the parliamentary coup in Paraguay; the conflicts in Venezuela; the retention of the Bolivian presidential plane in Vienna; the economic blockade of Cuba; the coup in Honduras; the US declaration that Venezuela is a threat to its national security; and, Argentina's claim to sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands cannot be forgotten. We wonder if it would have been effective in situations like those in Ecuador, Chile and Bolivia.

Regarding Mercosur, some institutionalizing milestones can also be observed in this period of time. Examples include the regulation of the Olivos Pact that created the

⁵ We call institutionalizing milestones those that can show concrete results in the origin of a process that leads to something higher than a speech.



Permanent Review Tribunal (2003); the creation of the Protocol of Asunción on Human Rights (2005); the Mercosur Structural Convergence Fund (2005); the Constitutive Protocol of ParlaSur (2005); the Mercosur Social Institute (2007); the Social Participation Support Unit (2010); the Intra-Mercosur Investment Cooperation and Facilitation Protocol (2017). These milestones within Mercosur were launched and reinforced as feedback on the bilateral relationship between Argentina and Brazil, which also had other milestones, such as the joint position in the G-20 Trade at the WTO Ministerial Conference (2003), the Buenos Aires Consensus (2003), the articulation of positions in the Financial G-20 for the reform of the international financial system, the Act of Copacabana (2004), the Gaucho Project (2004, goes into production in 2006) of military vehicle production (military cooperation), joint negotiation in the FTAA (2005), the First Joint Space Mission (2007), the establishment of the Binational Commission to pursue the joint enrichment of uranium for nuclear energy purposes (2008), the development of the KC-390, a military transport plane (2011), the creation of the "Strategic Integration Dialogue" (2012), the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Brazil and Argentina on Technical Regulations for the Automotive Sector (2018), the signing of the Montevideo Declaration on Argentina-Brazil Business Nuclear Cooperation (2018), and the Brazil-Argentina Trade Agreement for the automotive sector (2019), among others⁶.

At first glance, these milestones offer a couple of reflections. The first is that it is the perception of the Strategic Alliance that generates the greatest number of milestones that reinforce the institutional framework of the processes, and, as a consequence, as the perception gets closer to militaristic thinking, the milestones decline. The second is that, at the risk of destroying a bilateral relationship built over the years with much effort, governments that approach militaristic thinking do not care too much about breaking institutionalization - and the MAT - unilaterally.

This also confirms that the integration perceptions point to the preference of the actors regarding how the integration processes develop, and the way they decide their participation. In this sense, there is a certain consensus that governments on the right have an individualistic and liberal vision, while those on the left seek deeper forms with a solidarity tinge⁷. The former would prefer that the states diversify their trade links via NAFTA or the Economic Complementation Agreement with few restrictions, opting for less committed forms of integration such as free trade zones; in this sense, a more rigid institutionalization would be interpreted as a weakness rather than a strength. For their part, governments more on the left would refer to forms of integration that demand greater commitments and that cut margins of action for member states in negotiations with third parties (Lorenzini and Pereyra Doval, 2019). It is in this sense that we found it interesting to examine the lines of institutionalization of the regionalization processes.

⁶ These milestones - and trust - were reinforced by official presidential visits that decreased over time (Lula da Silva made 18 official trips to Argentina and Néstor Kirchner 5 to Brazil; Dilma Rousseff 5 trips to Argentina and Cristina Fernández 8 to Brazil; Michel Temer and Bolsonaro made only one official trip to Argentina each, while Mauricio Macri made 4 to Brazil).

⁷ To understand the relationship between integration processes and political ideology, the following works are recommended: Lorenzini and Pereyra Doval, 2019; Pereyra Doval, 2019; Gomes Saraiva and Granja Hernández, 2019; Caetano et. al, 2019; Sanahuja and López Burian, 2020; Lorenzini and Pereyra Doval, 2020, among others.



V. Conclusion

Imperial past, present of association and uncertain future, between fear and love. The three confused or reformulated images are part of the collective consciousness of the Argentine and Brazilian elites. Currently, national perceptions about the main political and economic partner are going through a moment of re-definition. The first thing to clarify is that, in the period under study, there was a tendency for progressive or left-wing or post-liberal governments to move closer to the perception of a strategic alliance, which gradually recedes as one turns to the right and closer to militaristic thought. The proposal stated that progressive governments should establish institutionalized links to prevent militaristic thinking from obscuring the bilateral relationship through unilateral measures. Therefore, it must be taken into account that the use of the variables was made with this trend in mind.

The uncertainty that this bilateral relationship has been generating for a couple of years revives old nationalist ghosts in which a conflict hypothesis dominates the analysis. Some deep forces from the past tend to prevail. This is the case of military nationalist thought which, based on disputes of the past, places Brazil in an imperialist position contrary to Argentine interests. In this sense, integration is part of that imperialism, almost like a macabre plan by the neighbouring country to increase its power and continue to harm Argentine interests. According to this model, the integration process follows a historical project of expansion and consolidation of the Brazilian hegemony in Latin America. The reverse of the relationship represents an anchor for Brazil that does not allow it to advance its economic and commercial intentions. Clearly, this model rejects regional integration.

The Strategic Alliance model points to a mutual reverence that hardly recognizes the differences which, in fact, exist between all binomials. The similarities – especially discursive – between the governments inaugurated at the beginning of the millennium announced Brazil as a privileged partner, while at the same time establishing an extremely favourable position to the integration process based on the renewed bilateral relationship. So much so that the surveys carried out by CARI in this period consider that regional integration should be the most relevant issue in the government's foreign policy. This regional integration would also be supported by the so-called Solidarity Association, which indicates a kind of benignity on the part of Brazil towards the rest of the countries in the region, supported and reinforced by Argentina.

Finally, we propose a third ideal type – that of the Mutually Assured Trust – for which international changes, debates about order, the diversity of claims are, among others, factors of uncertainty. For this reason, inaugurating a new bilateral and regional moment in the form of a MAT can be an interesting way to go.

This last concept, MAT, is considered a contribution that offers a new way of studying this so much revisited bilateral relationship in the future. The uncertainty regarding the future of Mercosur and the abandonment of UNASUR are clear demonstrations of the weakness of the process in terms of trust. The low institutional density forces the entire political process to a logic of constant consultation in all decision-making bodies. The consequences are clear: commitments are always temporary. The increase in mistrust is



inversely proportional to the creation of institutions: the greater the mistrust, the less institutionalization and vice versa.

For this last reason, integration based on the MAT is, ultimately, a work programme that aims to advance towards greater degrees of institutionalization. Common institutions weaken the ever-present game of interests and perceptions and establish clear rules of the game for countries. Here are two important debates which, in our opinion, mark the strategic agenda. The first is given by the will -or not- of both countries to advance the creation of government mechanisms common to the integration processes. The second refers to what form will they have, given the need to guarantee a fair balance of power between the states. The "distrustful perceptions" will continue if there are no institutional guarantees that make progress less reversible and set a date for the implementation of the common agenda. The proposed MAT presupposes a path of institutional advancement. Therefore, it is also about analysing these common proposals on the international scene. In short, the shared vision of the world is what allows a redefinition of relationships. As we will see, Mutually Assured Trust thus requires a common starting point (world view) that recovers the past and designs the shared game of future politics in a single key.

In conclusion, current national perceptions about Argentina's main political and economic partner are going through a moment of redefinition. The uncertainty revives old nationalist ghosts where conflict presides over the analysis. The near present contributed concepts such as strategic alliance or solidarity cooperation to inaugurate a new era. However, local, regional and international changes, debates about the international order, the diversity of claims are, among others, factors of uncertainty. Inaugurating a new bilateral and regional moment in the form of Mutually Assured Trust may be an interesting way to go.

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