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TÍTULO: Imperativos geopolíticos de Estados Unidos para la región del Báltico.

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RESUMEN: El artículo científico examina los intereses geopolíticos de los Estados Unidos en la región del Báltico. En primer lugar, se observa que los Estados bálticos se destacan por su complejo carácter geopolítico. La región en la que se encuentran las repúblicas bálticas se ha convertido en un campo de entrenamiento para una confrontación peligrosa entre la URSS y los Estados Unidos. Estas repúblicas lograron una integración más efectiva con las estructuras europeas. Esto, en primer lugar, se evidencia por dos hechos importantes. Desde las repúblicas bálticas en poco tiempo fueron admitidas en la Unión Europea y la OTAN. Esto también indica que las estructuras occidentales otorgan gran importancia a esta región; especialmente, Estados Unidos tenía claros imperativos geopolíticos en la región.

PALABRAS CLAVES: región báltica, antagonismo, Unión Europea, OTAN, integración.

TITLE: US geopolitical imperatives for the Baltic region.

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ABSTRACT: The scientific article examines the geopolitical interests of the United States in the Baltic region. First of all, it is noted that the Baltic States stands out for its complex geopolitical character. The region in which the Baltic republics are located has become a training ground for a dangerous confrontation between the USSR and the USA. These republics were able to achieve more effective integration with European structures. This, first of all, is evidenced by two important facts. Since the Baltic republics in a short time were admitted to the European Union and NATO. This also indicates that Western structures attached great importance to this region. Especially the United States had clear geopolitical imperatives in the region.

KEY WORDS: Baltic region, antagonism, European Union, NATO, integration.

INTRODUCTION.

The Baltic states' position in modern international relations system can be evaluated as to be rather complicated. Thus, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are situated in a region where countries are involved in severe geopolitical confrontations. The Baltic States, which had gained their independence on the threshold of the collapse of the USSR, managed to successfully and comprehensively integrate into Western Europe. It should be stressed that the Baltic States' serious interest in Western structures made the integration process be more dynamic. Most researchers believe that the Baltic states originally and culturally belong much more to the West. Even though the Baltic states were annexed by the Tsarist Russia in the XIX century, they preserved their national-cultural characteristics almost unchanged [S.Corum, 2013, p.8].

DEVELOPMENT.

In May 2004, the Baltic States became members of the European Union. They are also NATO members. Thus, it can be argued about formation of Baltic-Adriatic outpost of the European Union and NATO.

Most researchers are right to point out that the Baltic states' accession to NATO and the European Union will create grave problems for Russia in political, economic, and military spheres. Thus, successful integration in this direction has significantly strengthened the United States' political, economic and military-strategic positions in the region. As in other post-Soviet areas, its main strategic goal regarding the Baltic region was to eliminate Russia's dominance there and to expand its military sphere of influence till the Russian borders. This point also proves that the main line of the US general strategy for the post-Soviet space is to prevent Russia's attempts to recover its previous dominance.

The primary goal of the US strategy for the Baltic States was to persistently exclude Russia from the region. Thus, the likelihood of Russian intervention in the region again has been taken into account quite seriously in the US. Such concerns have intensified after Russia's annexation of Crimea and military actions in the south-east of Ukraine; for example, Z. Brzezinski, one of the key determining strategists in the US foreign policy, notes that the US and its allies must deploy troops in the Baltic region to prevent Russia's possible interventions. He adds that Putin desires to regain control over the Baltic States and underlines that his sudden actions in this direction could put NATO to a nonplus. Z. Brzezinski further elucidates his opinion and says: 'I acknowledge the likelihood of Riga and Tallinn's seizure by Putin one day to be realistic. At that time, we would only be able to criticize it and refrain from a nuclear war'. Putin should know that he would confront with the US troops in case of intervention in the region [Zb. Brzezinski, 2015, p.2].

Geopolitical characteristics of the Baltic region.

It is obvious that the US and Russia have experienced the different history of relations with the Baltic States. The fact is that Russia has a quite long history of relations with the countries of the region. And the US has significantly shorter experience of relations with the Baltic states. Despite that among post-Soviet countries only the Baltic states (except Russia) had a certain history of relations with the

US. The US recognized the independence of the Baltic states and established diplomatic ties with them as early as in 1922 [K. Marek, 1968, p.211].

The US was the first big power to recognize the independence of the Baltic states. It should be stressed that the US did not recognize the annexation of the Baltic states into the USSR in 1940. Sumner Welles, US Assistant Secretary of State, severely condemned it in his special statement and emphasized the elimination of political and territorial integrity of the Baltic states. Welles declared that the American people are against intervention of any big powers into domestic affairs of weak states. The interesting point is that the embassies of the Baltic states in the US continued operating even after their annexation by the USSR and the US recognized only them as legitimate subjects. It is clear that namely in this period the United States was struggling against the expansion of the USSR's influence, where communist regime increasingly consolidated.

The US has always considered the Baltic states as a part of Europe. As early as in September 1991, i.e. before the collapse of the USSR was declared, US President George H.W. Bush announced his country was ready to cooperate with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This fact indicates that the US distinguished the Baltic states from other post-Soviet countries and paid them special attention. This was obviously evidenced by the fact that the US did not refer the Baltic states to 'newly independent states'.

Immediately, after the collapse of the USSR, the US started making serious attempts to enable the Baltic states integrate into western structures as much as possible. Surely, the priority in this direction was given to their accession to the European Union and NATO. The US also started carrying out several special projects aimed at achieving sound integration of the Baltic states into NATO and the European Union. 'Baltic Action Plan' (August 1996) and 'Northern Europe Initiative' (September 1997) can be noted as most important ones among them [D.Volodin, 2004]. These projects considered supporting to democratic reforms in the Baltic states and strengthening US relations with them.

Expanding regional economic cooperation in the Baltic region was one of the issues the US paid special attention. Thus, the sovereignty of the Baltic states was believed by the US establishment to be much dependent on this particular point. Nevertheless, the US demonstrated more efforts for strengthening its military-political positions in the region. The US surely preferred realizing these imperatives through NATO. So, it was initiated to take consistent measures towards the admission of the Baltic states to membership of NATO within a short period. As a first step, the Baltic states were involved in Partnership for Peace Program of NATO and in March 1994 the US lifted the embargo on re-exportation of US weapons to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

The most serious US military-strategic step towards the Baltic states was the signing of the agreement on military cooperation with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in 1995. This agreement created great opportunities for the US to enjoy direct military influence in the region. So, the agreement covered provisions such as assistance to the Baltic states on capacity building of military personnel, intensive seminars and consultation on security issues. The US was also serious about establishing and developing military cooperation among the countries of the region themselves. We believe that by this the US also aimed at establishing region's common military power to control from a single headquarters.

Generally speaking, the US achieved in establishing comprehensive military cooperation with the Baltic states and among these countries themselves. The Baltic states from their side also demonstrated active initiatives for establishment and development of military cooperation with Western powers. For instance, in October 1991, i.e. two months prior to the collapse of the USSR, during meeting with Manfred Wörner, Secretary General of NATO the chairman of the Estonian Supreme Soviet conveyed his country's intentions to join the coalition, but Baltic states did not officially file a request for NATO membership between 1991 and 1993 when Russian troops were still in the region.

Lithuania filed an official request for joining to the coalition in January 1994, only after Russian troops left the country. Western powers from their side also did not believe that it was reasonable to admit the Baltic states to the coalition given the Russia's military presence in the region. The US considered the presence of Russian troops in the region as a serious threat to their sovereignties.

The US officials conducted intensive negotiations with their Russian counterparts for the full withdrawal of Russian troops from the region. The US also offered Russia its material and technical assistance in withdrawal of Russian troops possibly soon from the Baltic states. Russia ended its military presence in the Baltic region only in 1999 by dismantling its last radar installation in the region. [New Release, 1999]

US-Russia antagonism over the Baltic region.

All Russia's attempts to prevent Baltic countries from joining NATO turned out to be ineffective. The countries of the region openly stated that their security could only be provided through coalition with NATO and the EU. In response to Russia's pressure on the Baltic States, the US signed the Charter on Cooperation with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in January 1998. It was underlined in the Charter that the United States was firmly interested in the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The document also defines the Baltic states' full integration into European and Transatlantic political, economic and military structures as a common goal [Charter of partnership..., 1998] The Charter was very important for the parties in determining the outlines of cooperation between the US and the Baltic States in the XXI century.

During the signing ceremony of the Charter on Cooperation US President B.Clinton mentioned that the US was persistent in creating necessary conditions for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to join NATO. [W.Clinton, www.ee.en] This, once again, demonstrated that admission of the Baltic states to NATO was the basic line of the US strategy for the region.

The US appeared particularly active to involve the Baltic states in NATO after G.Bush won presidential election. The Baltic states initiated individually to take intensive measures to harmonize with NATO standards. Lithuanian Saeima, in its turn, also amended Article 137 of the national constitution prohibiting the deployment of foreign military bases in the country.

At NATO Summit in Paris, November 2002 Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia were invited to join the organization. In March 2004 these countries became full members of NATO. US President G. Bush called the admission of new members, including the Baltic states to NATO in 2004 as a great historical and political event. He mentioned that the new members of NATO had got a chance to become more powerful [W. Bush., 2017].

The admission of the Baltic states to NATO membership was assumed as a 'wake-up call' in Russia. Thus, after coalition membership of the Baltic states, which are situated in quite proximity to St. Petersburg and Moscow, Russia somehow felt as 'driven to the wall' in the Baltic Sea. Moreover, Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation become enclave amid NATO and EU member states. Therefore, the admission of the Baltic states to NATO and EU membership can be evaluated as a major geopolitical setback of Russia. So, enlarged through the Baltic states, NATO significantly boosted its positions and expanded opportunities to get access to the Baltic Sea.

The US reached one of its important geostrategic goals with this. So, the US obtained quite steady military-political positions in the region after that. This fact suggests that the US obtained the opportunity to have a real impact on Baltic states' foreign policy conduct after the admission to NATO and the EU. At that point Baltic States' major geostrategic importance for the United States was associated with their suitable role of buffer zone between Europe and Russia. And the US managed to take the sound measures to create a buffer zone from these countries. By including the Baltic states into its sphere of influence, the US acquired a strategic position to exert control over Russia's behavior to some extent.

With NATO membership, the Baltic states formed eastern end of the coalition and so, NATO reached to north-western borders of the Russian Federation. That is to say, north-western parts of Russia's territory partially became accessible for NATO. Thus, radiolocation stations have been installed in the territories of Latvia and Estonia, which allows keeping the distance of 460 km under surveillance. Russian soldiers report that the stations are much more functional. The stations provide transmission of real time information on the situation in the air space to the NATO command point. All these facts show that Russia has experienced serious geopolitical defeat in Baltic region.

Today, the format and level of relations of the Baltic states with Russia are almost regulated by Washington. Absence of capabilities by the Baltic states to freely establish ties with Russia evidence the above-mentioned argument. Thus, the West appreciates the Baltic states' escape from the Russian sphere of influence and their successful integration into Western structures and democratic reforms. We believe that most accepted and sympathetic approach prevailed in the West regarding the Baltic states is connected with their escape from Russia's sphere of influence. Russia surely wanted the Baltic states to be at least neutral and made lots of efforts to this end. However, results were completely in favor of the United States.

Our studies and observations show that during the first term of Obama's presidency, attitude of the US administration towards the Baltic states has weakened. It should be noted that during B. Obama's first term of office, US commitment throughout the entire post-Soviet space decreased to some extent. This is mostly explained by the fact that the democrats in the first place put forward the provisions of democratic reforms and human rights and this was met with a mixed perception by the post-Soviet regimes.

Behaviors of the leaders of the Baltic states did not fully satisfy the B. Obama administration. Even though the Baltic presidents were always welcomed guests in the White House during administrations of previous presidents, B. Obama never received them during his first term. Obama received the

presidents of the three Baltic states just before the visit to Russia in August 2013. Nevertheless, the leaders of the Baltic states, in their turn, are not totally satisfied with the position of the US taken towards them during Obama's presidency. The Baltic States try to justify their dissatisfaction referring to the following arguments:

Firstly, there is an argument that decaying attention of the US towards Europe as a whole challenges the development of transatlantic relations. It should be mentioned that official circles in Central and Eastern European countries have sometimes stated that the US mostly pursued its own interests their interests and was indifferent to their positions;

Secondly, it is interesting that the strategic document titled as 'Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century' (2012) pays attention to Europe contrary to all expectations. As says the title, the document prepared by the Pentagon defines strategic tasks of the US Ministry of Defense for the next decade to preserve US global leadership. The document prioritizes US strategic interests taking into account large-scale military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, situation in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Totally 16-page document allocates only a small part for Europe and President B.Obama's speech does not refer to either Europe or NATO. And this point caused to anxiety in the Baltic states, which from time to time were subject to Russia's pressure.

Thirdly, the Baltic states consider weaker enthusiasm for NATO's enlargement recent years from the side of US as contradicting to their interests. The Baltic states, assuming NATO's 'open door' policy as a necessary term for creating transatlantic collective security system, believe that in the post-cold war period B.Obama is the first US president who does not care for NATO's enlargement policy. Generally speaking, it should be mentioned that they are sure in Europe itself that transatlantic security issue is not a significant priority for B. Obama administration [L. Coffey, 2013, p.2].

Almost disregard to Europe and NATO in the above-mentioned document implies some important points indeed. First of all, it proves once more that the US initially tries to make maximum use of Europe and NATO's capabilities to ensure its global leadership and intends to be the only world leader, most importantly without any role and influence of Europe.

It should be noted that arguments regarding the existence of US special geopolitical plans for Europe are sounded quite frequently. G.Friedman, political analyst and chief intelligence officer of famous think tank 'Stratfor', in his book 'The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century' justifies Poland to be the main strategic ally of the United States. The United States will be fully supportive to Poland. Political analyst compares US-Poland future relations to US relationship with Israel, Japan and South Korea. [7, p.78] B.Jackson, another analyst, also believes that the United States is interested in the creation of a new coalition with a tough stance on Russia and accent given to Turkey and Poland.[3, p.15] Indeed, the realities show that the United States is quite actively using Poland against Russia.

The Baltic countries rely on the United States and Europe in their sovereignty and security issues and given these realities are concerned about it. So, it is assumed that with ensured global leadership the US will pay significantly less attention to them. NATO membership and expansion of cooperation with the US have been determined as priorities in national security strategies of the Baltic states and it is obvious that given Russian 'close proximity' they perceive the weakened US attention towards them in future as a troublesome case for their national security.

As already mentioned, inadequate attention of B.Obama administration to the region produced the disappointment in the countries of the region. Belø ki, J.Kerry, incumbent US Secretary of State has made approximately 30 trip to Eastern Europe since his appointment in 2013, which calls attention of the Baltic states. The Baltic states and the other Eastern European countries - they all have specific expectations from the United States. Primary expectations can be the followings:

-The US should send its high-level representatives to the region to prove its special focus on the transatlantic security issue.

-After completing its mission in Afghanistan, the United States must ensure that security cooperation with Eastern European countries, in particular with the Baltic states, does not weaken.

-To ensure the security more reliably, the US should develop new areas of military cooperation with Baltic states etc.

With the V. Putin's rise to power, Russia revived and became more actively engaged in international relations. Albeit Russia is not perceived as a direct military threat to Europe in these circumstances, its future strengthening generates concerns. Such concerns are more obvious in the Baltic countries. Thus, it is clear that Russia desires to regain its influence in the post-Soviet space. From this point of view, for the Baltic states having experienced more than fifty years of Russian hegemony it is vital to act together with the United States.

We believe that at present stage, Russian threat to the Baltic states seems to be quite real. Russia is actively using energy factor to exert pressure on the Baltic states who are completely dependent on Russia for gas supply [M. Ratner & P. Belkin, 2017]. Moreover, the Baltic states consider Russia's intentions to generate and strengthen ethno-separatism in the region as a serious threat to their national security.

Apparently, at present, the Baltic states have sound grounds for considering the United States as their main guarantor. And the United States, in its turn, intends to achieve maximum separation of these countries from Russia by using the instruments it has. As already mentioned, the US considers the Baltic region, like the other post-Soviet regions, as a suitable instrument to control Russia's behavior and to restrict its influence in international arena. It can be also considered that the Baltic region is the strategic part of the 'anaconda ring', through which the US tried to surround Russia.

Taking into account Russia's possible military intervention to the region as well, the US paid special attention to substantial development of military capacity and defense systems of the regional countries; for instance, the Baltic Battalion was established with direct support of the West as early as in 1994. The Battalion, mainly known as 'Baltbat', consists of soldiers from all the three Baltic countries with primary objective to ensure regional security. This point itself once more proves that US geopolitical strategies regarding different post-Soviet regions form parts of the overall strategy and have common features. The US prefers the post-Soviet countries to solve their security problems with Russia on their own. The US limits itself to provide with material-and-technical assistance. As already mentioned, the US attempted to damage Russia's positions in the region by setting Georgia on its own against Russia in August 2008, without engaging directly in the conflict.

The US cooperates with the Baltic states not separately but as a single subject. It is explained with the fact that all the three countries are facing the same regional threat (Russia) and their coordinated actions could be effective for elimination of the threat. Moreover, it was considered that jointly obtaining weaponry and ammunition would be useful for the Baltic states.

It should be mentioned that failure of Russian 'reset' policy and reverse in establishing US military-political supporting point in Central Asia made the US to pay more attention to the region. Such a change in the US policy was made in the second term of Obama's presidency. The main issue causing concern in the US is that Russia still has the potential to exert influence in the region. From this point of view, the US makes every effort to fortify its positions in the Baltic region, which is the only realistic stronghold against Russia at present.

The major strategic move of the United States was to ensure its permanent military presence in the region. The reality suggests that the Baltic states themselves are also interested in the deployment of the US military forces in the region. Thus, in October 2014, the Estonian Defense Minister openly called the West for protecting the Baltic countries from Russia. Minister Sven Mikser explained it

with frequent violation of air and water space by Russian military aircrafts and submarines. The Minister even blamed Russia for returning to 'cold war' terms. And Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė called Russia a terrorist state. In the spring of 2014, after Russia's annexation of Crimea the US deployed its military forces in the Baltic states. The US justified its step as protecting the region from Russia's threat, which was assessed to be quite realistic. US troops were initially considered to stay in the Baltic states till the end of 2014. However, Ben Hodges, commander of U.S. Army Europe, later stated that the military forces would stay on in the Baltic states in 2015. The American side explained it with reason of preventing Russian aggression and ensuring the security of its allies.

On the whole, the Baltic states reiterated many times their desires regarding permanent stay of NATO forces in the region. This issue was raised at the NATO Summit in Wales, too. NATO policy-makers believe that after Crimea's annexation by Russia, the whole eastern flank of the alliance has been under serious threat. This threat was reported to be particularly grave for the Baltic states. Thus, Russia's desire to re-establish its control over the entire post-Soviet space is clear from its behavior. Native Russian speaking population living in the region can serve as a key reason for Russian military intervention.

CONCLUSIONS.

As can be seen from the above, the US is demonstrating persistent efforts for strengthening its comprehensive political, ideological, economic and military positions in the Baltic states, as in other post-Soviet countries.

The US has already managed to convince the Baltic states that the US is more reliable partner for them. The main goal of the US geopolitical strategy for the Baltic states also was to prevent Russia's attempts to reach a possible turning point. We believe that the US has achieved this goal in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia more effectively than other post-Soviet countries. Thus, as we have already

mentioned, only the Baltic states (as well as Ukraine since the end of 2013) do not establish cooperative relations with Russia beyond US control. Of course, it should be mentioned that in general the Baltic states are almost not interested to develop relations with Russia and assess military intervention from Russian side always completely realistic.

The Baltic states have started to take such a threat more seriously after the annexation of Crimea and situation in the south-east of Ukraine. One of the main issues causing serious concerns in the Baltic states is that they regard suspension of energy supply at any time as a real risk. From this point of view, a great deal of energy dependency on Russia complicates the situation of the Baltic states. The West, in its turn, does not cover its concern regarding the Baltic states. Therefore, the deployment of US military bases in the region can be considered as indication of the West's major concern.

In general, we believe that the future situation in the Baltic states can seriously impact the geopolitical outlines of the European Union than in the Ukraine does. Namely this countries form geopolitical borders of the European Union. Today, when it comes to geopolitical activities, Russia openly relies on its army in this issue and it is sure to be more obvious in future. From this point of view, there is no guarantee that Russia will not use open military rhetoric against the Baltic states. As already mentioned, from time to time Russia violates air and water space of the Baltic states and it becomes a trend.

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