

GEOPOLITICS IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFTER TRUMP: HAS THE UNITED STATES ABANDONED HEGEMONY IN LATIN AMERICA?

LA GEOPOLÍTICA EN EL HEMISFERIO OCCIDENTAL DESPUÉS DE TRUMP: ¿HA ABANDONADO LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS LA HEGEMONÍA EN AMÉRICA LATINA?

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Resumen: La presidencia aislacionista de Donald Trump fue solo la última, aunque la más radical, de una serie de administraciones estadounidenses que han ignorado en gran medida fomentar relaciones con América Latina y el Caribe. Esta aparente retirada ha resultado en el ascenso de Brasil como una potencia regional importante, así como en la incursión de la influencia rusa y china en la región. Teniendo en cuenta estos desarrollos, este artículo presenta un panorama histórico de la hegemonía de los Estados Unidos en el hemisferio occidental antes de describir cómo los reveses recientes han socavado esta tendencia en las áreas de comercio regional, diplomacia y seguridad. A medida que la administración Biden hace su transición, el artículo termina proponiendo cómo los Estados Unidos podría recuperar influencia en la región, colaborando con sus vecinos del sur para promover el desarrollo económico, defender los derechos humanos y enfrentar los actuales problemas de seguridad de la región.

Abstract: The isolationist presidency of Donald Trump was only the last, albeit the most radical, of a series of United States administrations that have largely ignored fostering close relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. This apparent withdrawal has resulted in the steady rise of Brazil as a significant regional power as well as the incursion of Russian and Chinese influence in the region. In light of these developments, this article presents a historical overview of United States hegemony in the western hemisphere before outlining how recent setbacks have undermined this trend in the areas of regional trade,

diplomacy, and security. As the Biden administration makes its transition, the article finishes by proposing how the United States could regain influence in the region by collaborating with its southern neighbors to promote economic development, defend human rights, and confront the region's ongoing security issues.

1. Introduction

Since the consolidation of a sovereign United States, relations with Latin America and the Caribbean have been at the forefront of the country's foreign policy concerns. As the first independent country in the western hemisphere, the United States was already in an advantageous position when a wave of nationalist movements swept across the continents of North and South America in the early 19th century. Seeing itself as a beacon of the Enlightenment and a symbol of anti-colonial struggle, the United States was quick to create a sphere of influence among the newly independent countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. However, this idealism was only valid so long as it was compatible with the vision of the United States' manifest destiny to grow territorially and expand economically across the hemisphere it had recently liberated from foreign tyranny. In geopolitical terms, this destiny meant adopting a grand strategy of establishing hegemony, first on the North American continent and later throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Within two centuries, however, the United States managed to expand its hegemony on a scale that would have been unfathomable to even the most visionary of the Founding Fathers. By the end of the 20th century,

the Cold War had come to an end and it became clear that unipolarity under United States leadership would define the new world order. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the apparent defeat of the international communist movement, United States economic, diplomatic, and military hegemony in the western hemisphere seemed certain and undisputable.

Despite this initial certainty, however, the past two decades have seen the United States turn its attention away from Latin America and the Caribbean. Ever since the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the beginning of the Bush administration's war on terror, the Middle East has almost monopolized the focus of United States foreign policy. Despite President Obama's efforts to solve the country's southern migrant crisis and restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, his administration ultimately failed to produce a coherent strategy for furthering relations with the region as a whole. Thus, if the Bush and Obama administrations marked a gradual setback in United States-Latin American relations, then the recent administration of President Trump has bordered on complete abandonment of the region. In the meantime, these trends have been accompanied by the rise of Brazil as a regional power that is increasingly eager to prove itself as such on the world stage. Moreover, Russia and China have taken advantage of the United States' absence and isolationism, becoming more assertive in establishing both military and economic ties with countries that continue to struggle with the pressing issues of insecurity and underdevelopment.

With a new presidential administration about to take control of the United States' foreign policy apparatus, there is still

a chance for the country to reclaim lost ground in its relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. This article argues that restoring respectful diplomatic ties, returning to the pursuit of regional economic integration, and cooperating to tackle international security issues would not only benefit the United States but could also produce positive results in the region as a whole. The article begins with a section outlining the historical development of United States hegemony in the western hemisphere, itself divided into three broad phases of the United States' relations with Latin America and the Caribbean: establishing hegemony in the 19th and early 20th centuries, defending hegemony during the Cold War period, and preserving hegemony at the end of the 20th century. The following section addresses the gradual withdrawal of the United States from the region in the 21st century as well as hegemonic challenges from Brazil, Russia, and China. Finally, the article concludes with a proposal to reestablish United States hegemony in the western hemisphere by improving relations with Latin America and the Caribbean.

2. History of United States Hegemony in the Western Hemisphere

2.1 Establishing Hegemony

In the aftermath of its own successful struggle against British rule in 1783, the United States could sense that the age of European colonialism was coming to an end. As the first sovereign country in the western hemisphere, the United States understood and took advantage of

its exceptional historical and geopolitical position. In need of capital for its extensive military campaigns against rival European powers, France agreed to sell the United States its North American territories. The resulting Louisiana Purchase of 1803 extended the United States to the northern provinces of New Spain. The following year, Haitian revolutionaries succeeded in their struggle against French rule. With the exception of its continued possession of a few small islands in the Antilles and the South American territory of Guiana, the loss of Haiti marked the end of French colonialism in the region. The success of the Haitian revolution not only made Haiti the second sovereign country in the western hemisphere but also the only independent black country in the world. On account of this and its own institution of black slavery, the United States would not recognize Haitian independence until 1862. In the meantime, the United States gained considerably greater access to the Caribbean Sea –which was then limited to the port of New Orleans– by purchasing Florida from Spain in 1819.

That same year, the establishment of an independent Gran Colombia in South America and the independence of Mexico in 1821 foreshadowed the collapse of the Spanish Empire. As European colonial rule was coming to an end, the United States wasted no time in tipping the balance of power in its favor. The administration of President Monroe was the first to declare a grand strategy of United States foreign policy in the region, as the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 stated:

It is impossible that [foreign] powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness; nor can anyone believe that our southern brethren, if left

to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord (Dietz, 1984, 4).

Through this declaration, the United States created a regional sphere of influence that it considered vital to its economic and security interests. In spite of the hemispheric scope of the doctrine, there were more imminent issues with respect to the consolidation of United States hegemony. Without further territorial expansion, the United States would remain solely an Atlantic power. Thus, in order to justify the country's westward push to the Pacific, the United States supported Texan secession from Mexico and finally annexed the territory in 1845. The resulting war would be the first military conflict between the United States and a Latin American country. By 1848, not only had the United States secured its annexation of Texas, but it had also conquered a swath of territory that extended to the Pacific coastline of California.

With its continental ambitions achieved through the acquisition of Mexico's northern territories, the formalization of border treaties with British North America, as well as the purchase of Alaska from Russia, the United States was finally ready to look southward. In 1856, the United States Congress approved the Guano Islands Act, which states:

Whenever any citizen of the United States discovers a deposit of guano on any island, rock, or key, not within the lawful jurisdiction of any other government, and not occupied by the citizens of any other government, and takes peaceable possession thereof, and occupies the same, such island, rock, or key may, at the discretion of the President, be considered as appertaining to the United States (Guano Islands Act, 1856).

Guano, a seabird manure that can be processed for agricultural use, was a valuable natural resource before the

development of manufactured fertilizers. Through the Guano Islands Act, the United States took possession of Navassa Island between Haiti and Jamaica in 1858 as well as the Bajo Nuevo and Serranilla Banks between Nicaragua and Jamaica in 1869 and 1879, respectively (Office of Insular Affairs, 2003).

In 1898, following the mysterious and controversial explosion of the USS *Maine* in the port of Havana, the United States declared war on Spain. Within a few months, Spain had surrendered and ceded its remaining Caribbean colonies of Puerto Rico and Cuba as well as the Philippines to the United States. While Puerto Rico was officially incorporated as a United States territory, Cuba was granted nominal sovereignty as a de facto protectorate of the United States through an amended constitution that limited the Cuban government's rights to conduct foreign policy and gave the United States permission to use Guantanamo Bay as a naval base. The so-called Platt Amendment to the Cuban constitution set the precedent for what would become the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which "affirmed the duty of the of the United States to intervene in cases of 'chronic wrongdoing' or 'impotence' on the part of Latin American governments which might otherwise justify intervention by non-American powers" (Connell-Smith, 1976, 138). This concern for the quality of government in Latin America coincided with the expansion of United States economic interests in Central America and the Caribbean. Multinational corporations like the United Fruit Company required considerable land to conduct their operations in the region. As they grew, they also needed access to transportation infrastructure

and communication networks such as railways, ports, and telegraph stations.

To ensure that both political and logistic conditions were satisfactory for corporate expansion in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as to collect unpaid government loans, the United States military occupied Panama from 1903 to 1914; the Dominican Republic in 1903, 1905, and from 1916 to 1924; Cuba from 1906 to 1909 and again in 1912; Honduras in 1907; Nicaragua in 1909, from 1912 to 1925, and subsequently from 1926 to 1933; as well as Haiti from 1915 to 1934 (Dietz, 1984). Though these interventions were conducted to secure United States interests in the region, the military occupations nevertheless resulted in substantial development projects. For example, during the occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1906 to 1909,

programs were enacted in education, health, sanitation, agriculture, and communications; highways were built; and other public works were created. In addition, other programs crucial to strengthening state structures and a market economy were implemented, including both a census and a cadastral survey (Library of Congress, 2001, 38).

Similarly, during the occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, the military “brought in United States physicians to create a public health program that included the establishment of hospitals, clinics, and training schools for doctors and nurses” as well as “tried to modernize agriculture by creating an agricultural-technical system [...] with the help of United States agricultural experts” (Library of Congress, 2001, 281-282).

The largest and most significant development project, however, took place in Panama. After supporting the country

in its secession from Colombia in 1903, the United States signed a treaty with the new government that granted it the “use, occupation, and control of a sixteen-kilometer-wide strip of territory and extensions of three nautical miles into the sea from each terminal for the construction, maintenance, operation, sanitation, and protection of an isthmian canal” (Library of Congress, 1989, 23). Perhaps the most important of these responsibilities was that of protecting the geographically strategic and economically lucrative Panama Canal Zone, which was completed in 1914 and was to remain under United States military administration indefinitely. The period of United States territorial expansion in the western hemisphere finally reached its peak with the purchase of the Danish West Indies –later renamed the United States Virgin Islands– in 1917.

2.2 Defending Hegemony

In contrast to the interventionist policies of President Theodore Roosevelt, the Good Neighbor Policy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration was based on the principle of promoting hemispheric integration through diplomacy and trade. The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) was signed in 1947 to serve as a framework for mutual defense and the Organization of American States (OAS) was established the following year to provide a platform for regional dialogue and cooperation. One of the organization’s founding documents, the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, predated even the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights and so became the world’s first international human rights treaty

(UN Human Rights, 2020). Despite this seeming improvement in relations, the optimism that had accompanied the end of the Second World War was short-lived. As the United States became increasingly anxious about the spread of Soviet influence around the world, the OAS was gradually transformed into an instrument for deterring communism in Latin America and the Caribbean. Therefore, in spite of brief efforts to create a more liberal sphere of influence in the region, the Soviet threat to its hegemony forced the United States to revert to the realist position first outlined in the Monroe Doctrine.

Throughout the Cold War, the United States went to great lengths to preserve its hegemony in the western hemisphere. The current norms of international relations, however, had changed significantly since the beginning of the 20th century, as the international community began to look unfavorably at unilateral military interventions that undermined state sovereignty and self-determination. Thus, through the recently established network of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the United States began to exercise its power by means of covert operations. The left-wing sympathies of Guatemalan President Arbenz, for example, made him the first Latin American victim of a CIA-orchestrated coup in 1954. In an effort to balance hard power politics with soft power influence, the Eisenhower administration introduced the economic development initiative known as Operation Pan America in 1958, which was succeeded by President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in 1961. That same year, however, the United States further tarnished its image of a good neighbor with a series of failed attempts to overthrow the Castro regime in Cuba, namely through the poorly organized Bay of Pigs invasion

and the Operation Mongoose sabotage campaign.

When civil war broke out in the Dominican Republic in 1965, the United States reacted quickly to restore stability in fear of another communist takeover in the region. President Johnson requested the OAS –which had recently suspended Cuba's membership following the country's attempt to stockpile Soviet nuclear weapons– to organize an international peacekeeping contingent in response to the Dominican crisis. The resulting Inter-American Armed Peace Force (IAPF) consisted of assistance from Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Paraguay (Yates, 2015). This attempt at complying with the international norms of legitimacy, however, was in the end a farce, as the invitation to invade was not delivered until after United States forces had already landed in the Dominican Republic (Dietz, 1984). Similarly, when the Reagan administration acted to depose the communist New Jewel Movement that had taken power in Grenada in 1983, it organized a small Caribbean Peace Force (CPF) of soldiers from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) –Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines– as well as Barbados and Jamaica to accompany the much larger United States invasion force (Negrete, 1993). Though both operations were ultimately successful in their objectives of restoring stability and deterring communism, they did little to persuade the international community that the United States was partaking in legitimate multilateral actions.

During the Cold War period, the United States also began to play a more active role in South America, where a series of military

coups had transformed the continent's political landscape. The first took place in Paraguay in 1954, followed by Brazil in 1964, Bolivia in 1971, Uruguay and Chile in 1973, and finally Argentina in 1976 (Lessa, 2019). Of particular significance for the United States was the overthrow of Chilean President Allende, in which the CIA played a covert role in replacing his democratically elected leftist government with the right-wing Pinochet regime (Zanchetta, 2016). These six countries, with the later addition of Peru and Ecuador in more marginal roles, formed the international anti-communist intelligence network known as Operation Condor. According to Lessa (2019),

Operation Condor comprised three phases: first, close coordination and intelligence exchange; second, operations in the pursuit of opponents in South America; and third, targeted assassinations outside South America, such as that of former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier together with his assistant in September 1976 in Washington DC (11).

Declassified Pentagon documents reveal that not only was the United States aware of Operation Condor, but it also supported the network by providing South American intelligence agencies with computers and communications technology as well as training their personnel in counterinsurgency techniques at the School of the Americas military academy, which was administered by the United States Army in the Panama Canal Zone (McSherry, 2009). Despite the fact that all the countries that had participated in Operation Condor were members of the OAS and signatories to the organization's declaration of human rights, the network's activities resulted in countless cases of political imprisonment, torture,

disappearance, and mass killings such as those that took place during Argentina's so-called Dirty War.

The ordeals of the Cold War may have strained the United States' relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, but the country nevertheless succeeded in defending its hegemony in the western hemisphere. Though President Reagan's support of anti-Sandinista insurgent groups in Nicaragua failed to topple the only Soviet-aligned regime in Latin America besides Cuba, the revolutionary movement finally agreed to step down following its defeat in the general elections of 1990. With the Sandinistas gone and the Soviet Union on the verge of collapse, Cuba remained alone in the face of a crippling economic embargo from the United States. Latin America was about to enter into a new era of relations with the United States, one in which there was no alternative to accepting the country's economic and military dominance.

2.3 Preserving Hegemony

For the United States, the end of the Cold War meant the end of foreign threats to its hegemony in the western hemisphere. With the advent of globalization and the defeat of the international communist movement, the United States could focus its resources on rebuilding Latin America and the Caribbean in its own image. This, however, would prove to be a challenging endeavor. By the end of the 20th century, much of the region was still direly underdeveloped, and modernization efforts took the form of adopting neoliberal economic policies. In the cases of the most underdeveloped countries, rapid economic liberalization resulted in

profound social issues like inequality and unemployment. For example, Bolivia's privatization of state-owned enterprises in the mid-1980s led to the unemployment of some 30,000 unionized workers (Corva, 2008). Predominately indigenous tin miners, they began migrating to the rural areas of the country to grow coca. By 1986, "approximately 15% of Bolivia's employable workforce was engaged in the coca-cocaine industry and Bolivia's coca farmers were producing more than 50% of the global coca supply" (Corva, 2008, 186). With largely unregulated borders, South America's coca producers were able to deliver their cash crops to international criminal organizations like Colombia's Medellín or Cali drug cartels, which were then responsible for producing and distributing cocaine through Central America and Mexico to the lucrative United States black market.

With the Panama Canal due to be transferred to Panamanian administration by the year 2000 according to a set of treaties signed by the Carter administration, it was considered in the national interest of the United States to ensure that the canal be inherited by a friendly and stable government. In what would be its last unilateral military operation in the region, the United States deposed the country's dictator, General Noriega, in 1989. Noriega was subsequently extradited to the United States, where he was tried and sentenced for his involvement in the international drug trade, and Panama began its transition to democratic rule. Future efforts at fighting the international drug trade would focus on cooperating with Latin American governments rather than intervening in them. Through its Andean initiative, the Bush administration sought to eradicate coca production at the

source in Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. In order to do so,

security training and equipment as well as military and economic assistance were provided. Additionally, these countries were assisted in locating coca-producing areas, destroying laboratories and processing centers, blocking shipments of precursor chemicals and illicit weapons, and executing eradication programs (Francis & Mauser, 2011, 163).

This initiative was formally extended by the Clinton administration through his Plan Colombia, which focused on aiding the country to pacify insurgent groups involved in narcotrafficking such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).

The Clinton administration was also responsible for promoting trade in the region. Signed in 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) eliminated tariffs and other trade barriers between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. According to Guida (2018), NAFTA "should have been only the first step towards a future hemispheric area of free trade stretching from Alaska to Argentina" with the goal of increasing "the dependence of the Latin American countries on the United States" and thus "guaranteeing [United States] hegemony in the region" (202). Indeed, that year at the inaugural Summit of the Americas, the OAS announced the initiative to create a hemispheric trade zone called the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005. Meanwhile, the United States Agency for Development (USAID) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) became important instruments of United States soft power by sponsoring social programs and strengthening the region economically.

With its adoption of soft power strategies for preserving hegemony in the region, the United States initially refrained from intervening when the Haitian military overthrew the democratically-elected government of President Aristide in 1991. However, amid growing instability and a worsening humanitarian crisis, the United States appealed to the United Nations Security Council for permission to depose the military regime. In 1994, the Security Council resolved to allow the United States, Argentina, and Poland to conduct a multilateral military intervention in Haiti. Once the primary objective of reestablishing democratic rule was accomplished, United States troops were replaced by United Nations peacekeeping forces.

3. Geopolitics in the Western Hemisphere in the 21st Century

3.1 Withdrawal of the United States

Though the Middle East had been geopolitically significant for United States foreign policy throughout the Cold War and especially after the Gulf War, the region became an immediate priority for the Bush administration after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. With the United States militarily engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq, little attention was given to fostering relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. When Haitian President Aristide was overthrown again in 2004, another United Nations peacekeeping mission was organized to restore order in the country. This time, however, it was Brazil that constituted

the primary military component of the mission. That same year, Cuba and Venezuela signed an agreement of mutual support amid continued yet ineffective United States efforts to end the Castro regime by means of economic sanctions. The agreement coincided with a general shift to the left in Latin American politics as many countries had become disillusioned with the neoliberalism of the 1990s. The OAS made little progress in meeting the 2005 deadline for consolidating the FTAA, and the initiative was ultimately abandoned. The following year, Bolivia joined the Cuban–Venezuelan partnership and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) was formed as a revisionist alternative to United States hegemony in Latin America. By 2009, the bloc had expanded to include Ecuador and Nicaragua following the reelection of its left-wing Sandinista party. Membership was also extended to Grenada as well as the five OECS countries that had supported the United States invasion of it in 1983, implying a change of sympathies in the region and a shift in local views of United States leadership.

Although primarily concerned with the war on terror in the Middle East, the Bush administration nevertheless continued to fight the war on drugs in Latin America and the Caribbean. President George W. Bush's Merida initiative, itself an extension of President George H.W. Bush's Andean initiative, aimed to assist Mexico in its fight against drug cartels and local marijuana growers by providing the government with both economic aid and security equipment. The increasing militarization of the war on drugs, however, ultimately failed to bring an end to the region's problems with international crime. From 2004 to 2009,

six Latin American countries –with the exception of Iraq, which was second on the list– ranked among the highest for violent deaths per 100,000 of population. In descending order, the countries were ranked respectively as follows: El Salvador, Jamaica, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela, and Guatemala (Marcella, 2013, 71-72).

In Guatemala alone, 96 percent of homicides went unresolved in 2009. Marcella adds that one of the consequences of such extreme crime rates –combined with structural problems like corrupt police forces and ineffective judicial institutions– is the privatization of security, “as it is estimated that in 2007 there were 2.5 million private security guards in Latin America, exceeding the total number of personnel of all the Latin American military establishments as well as the police” (74). Still, with only 8 percent of the world’s population, 42 percent of worldwide murders occurred in Latin America in 2013 (Marcella, 2013).

Amid statistics such as these, combined with the Caribbean region’s curse of frequent natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes, the United States has become the final destination of millions of Latin American migrants in the 21st century. While the Obama administration responded to this growing crisis on the United States’ southern border through both humanitarian policies like the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and deportations, little was done to address the source of the problem in Latin America. Moreover, despite President Obama’s intentions to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba by reopening the United States embassy in Havana, raising the limit on remittances that United States citizens could send to Cuba, as well as opening

the country to United States tourism, his administration was ultimately unable to win the support of Congress to completely repeal the economic embargo. Finally, in spite of repeated promises to close the controversial Guantanamo Bay detention camp, nothing was done to change either the operation of the military prison or the status of the naval base in general, which continues to be a point of contention between Cuba and the United States.

While Latin America and the Caribbean may not have been a central focus of United States foreign policy under the Bush and Obama administrations, it was the subsequent Trump administration that resulted in a decisive withdrawal from the region. President Trump’s aggressive, disrespectful, and undiplomatic rhetoric –such as his reference to Haiti as a “shithole country” or his generalized accusation of Mexicans being “drug traffickers, criminals, and rapists”– has accompanied a hardline stance against southern migration, as demonstrated by his campaign against the DACA program and his 2018 proposal to “suspend the ‘temporary protection status’ (TPS) given to nearly 300,000 Salvadoreans [...] following an earthquake in 2001” (Guida, 2018, 207-208). Diplomatic relations with the region were further damaged that year when Trump became the first United States president to cancel his participation in the Summit of the Americas since the event was first organized under the Clinton administration. Another recent reversal of President Clinton’s policies towards the region has been rebranding NAFTA as the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA). This decision, along with the United States’ withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which includes not only Mexico and Canada but also

Chile and Peru, represented a definitive step away from the Clinton administration's vision of creating a hemispheric trade zone. In accordance with its economic isolationism and disregard for soft power policies, the Trump administration reduced aid to development and health assistance programs in Latin America by about 36 percent and also cut funding to USAID in 2019 (Guida, 2018).

President Trump's preference for hard power was made evident in his administration's reversal of President Obama's progress in restoring diplomatic and economic relations with Cuba. Despite the temporary thaw in relations under the Obama administration, United States companies are now once again "unable to partake in transactions through the Cuban state, as this could have the effect of providing the current regime with funding to consolidate its control over Cuban civil society" and individual United States tourists "are no longer permitted to travel to Cuba alone" (de Bhal, 2018, 12-13). Moreover, the Trump administration's approach to the political crisis in Venezuela provided further evidence for its unwillingness to act multilaterally through the region's established diplomatic channels. Thus, when President Trump revealed that he was considering a "military option" for Venezuela in 2017, the proposition was "immediately rejected by many of Washington's closest partners in Latin America" (Camilleri, 2017, 194).

3.2 Rise of Brazil

On account of its size, population, and relatively high economic capacity, Brazil has long had the potential of developing into a regional power. These structural

characteristics have historically been accompanied by consistent ambitions to prove itself on the international stage. For example, despite its geographic isolation from the conflicts, Brazil actively participated in both world wars as a member of the Allied coalitions. As the host of the Rio Treaty and a founding member of the OAS, Brazil cooperated with both the United States and South American partners against communist incursion into the region during the Cold War period. Subsequently, in response to the signing of NAFTA, Brazil became a leading figure in the establishment of the Southern Common Market known as MERCOSUR. When Latin American politics began to take a turn against neoliberalism in the early 21st century, the Sao Paulo Forum became a symbol of solidarity between the region's left-wing movements. In 2009, Brazil joined Russia, India, China, and South Africa to form the BRICS organization of rising regional powers.

Despite Brazil's active participation in all of these initiatives, however, perhaps the most significant demonstration of the country's growing regional influence has been its leading role in the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). The establishment of the organization coincided with the 2008 Colombian military strike against FARC rebels based in Ecuador. The intrusive operation resulted in Ecuador breaking diplomatic relations with Colombia and Venezuela mobilizing troops to support Ecuador if tensions escalated even further. To prevent future regional crises, UNASUR was expanded to include the Council of South American Defense (CDS) the following year (Marcella, 2013). Although the political and security objectives of both UNASUR and the CDS are practically the same as those of the OAS, their exclusion

of the United States has given Brazil “the principal role in setting the agenda and determining responses to regional crises” (Trinkunas, 2013, 93). As Trinkunas explains, this

was apparent in the 2008 separatism crisis in Bolivia, where UNASUR quickly became the dominant forum for addressing Bolivia’s internal political crisis for Brazil and other regional leaders, despite the efforts by separatist actors to go to the OAS as a preferred setting. Similarly, the 2009 crisis over the expanded use of Colombian military facilities by [United States] forces was resolved with UNASUR as a venue, precisely because it excluded the United States, but included Colombia (93).

Since then, Brazil has continued to play an active role in upholding regional security. In 2012, for example, Brazilian police forces coordinated joint actions with their Peruvian counterparts to destroy cocaine laboratories. That same year, the Brazilian government announced new policies to target cybercrime, which had caused the region over \$93 billion in annual losses in 2011 (Marcella, 2013).

Outside of its direct sphere of influence, Brazil has also taken opportunities to present itself in multilateral humanitarian actions. In 2004, it replaced the United States as the leading participant of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti. Accordingly, at the 2005 United Nations World Summit, it endorsed the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) initiative, whose three pillars outline the “protection responsibilities of the state” with respect to its own population, the “international assistance and capacity-building” role of other states in meeting those obligations, as well as the “timely and decisive response” that is justified if those obligations are not met (UN General Assembly, 2009, 2).

In response to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in Libya in 2011, Brazil proposed to further develop the RtoP framework with the principle of Responsibility while Protecting (RwP), which emphasizes the need for “greater normative and institutional accountability of those intervening under the delegated authority of the UN Security Council” (Tourinho et al., 2016, 5). Since then, Brazil has requested a permanent seat on the Security Council alongside the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China.

3.3 Incursion of Russia and China

The dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War effectively diminished Russia’s global influence and decreased popular support for communist movements around the world. In Latin America, this phenomenon manifested itself in the temporary electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, a dire economic crisis in Cuba, and the FARC’s turn to narco-trafficking in Colombia. Despite Russia’s forced retreat from the region in the 1990s, the country has been steadily regaining lost ground since the beginning of the 21st century. Between 2000 and 2009, Russia signed 200 cooperation agreements with Latin American countries. In those years, President Putin made five official visits to the region, while the presidents of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela all made official visits to Russia in 2009 alone (Rodríguez Hernández, 2019). Despite having pursued bilateral agreements with several Latin American countries, Russia’s primary partners in the region have been the revisionist ALBA bloc members and Brazil.

Ever since the High-Level Intergovernmental Commission was established as a diplomatic channel between Russia and Venezuela in 2002, the countries have signed a series of arms deals by which Russia provides Venezuela with military equipment ranging from Kalashnikov AK-103 rifles and Tor-M1 anti-aircraft missiles to Mi helicopters and Sukhoi fighter jets. In 2006, for example, negotiations were finalized for the construction of an arms factory and a helicopter repair facility in Venezuela (Rodriguez Hernandez, 2019). Between 2011 and 2014, the two countries conducted a series of provocative military exercises with Nicaragua amid protests from the United States' ally Costa Rica, a country that has a history of territorial disputes with Nicaragua but no standing army to defend its claims. Moreover, to counter United States economic sanctions against Russia's ALBA allies, President Putin wrote off \$32 billion of Cuba's pending debts to Russia in 2014 and bilateral trade between Russia and Venezuela rose by nearly 25 percent between 2017 and 2018, exceeding \$85 million in exchanges (Mosendz, 2014; Rodriguez Hernandez, 2019). In response to President Trump's repeated threats to use military force against Venezuela in 2019, Russia sent two airplanes carrying troops and materials to the country in an escalation of tensions reminiscent of its involvement in Cuba during the Cold War period (Garcia et al., 2019).

Despite the security implications of Russia's increasing involvement with the ALBA countries, Brazil is nevertheless Russia's primary trading partner in the region. Following an agreement signed in 2004, bilateral trade between the two countries exceeded \$2 billion that year. Thus, while Brazil had accounted for

only 11 percent of Russia's trade in Latin America and the Caribbean in 1992, it was responsible for over 40 percent in 2008. By comparison, Argentina was in second place at over 12 percent, while Venezuela and Cuba accounted for only 6 and under 2 percent, respectively (Rodriguez Hernandez, 2019). Besides trade, Russia and Brazil have pursued a number of bilateral initiatives in various sectors including energy, nuclear technology, aerospace research, telecommunications, and military innovation (Rodriguez Hernandez, 2019). Already members of the Group of Twenty (G20) industrialized economies, Russia and Brazil aim to create a counterbalance to the dominating Group of Seven (G7) countries through the BRICS organization. This objective, however, is impossible without the involvement of China.

While Russia has mostly focused its influence on ideological allies in Latin America and the Caribbean, the influence of China has become hemispheric. In 2005, China signed its first bilateral free trade agreement in the region with Chile, followed by Peru in 2009 and Costa Rica in 2011. President Xi has made five official visits to Latin America since assuming office in 2012, touring 11 different countries on his first four visits and dedicating his most recent trip in 2018 to attend the G20 summit in Argentina and formally incorporate Panama as the first Latin American member of China's global Belt and Road Initiative (Ramon-Berjano, 2019). In order to extend its trade network deeper into the region, China has supported several large-scale infrastructure development projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although plans to build a Chinese-funded canal across Nicaragua were ultimately

abandoned, construction of the Bioceanic Corridor, which will connect Brazil to the Pacific coast through an international network of highways and railways, is currently underway.

By funding such projects, the China Development Bank and the China Export-Import Bank have already surpassed the United States-based IDB as the region's greatest lender. From 2005 to 2017, Chinese loans in Latin America and the Caribbean amounted to over \$150 billion dollars, with Venezuela and Brazil being the primary recipients at over \$62 and \$42 billion, respectively (Sullivan & Lum, 2018). At the same time, trade between China and Latin America has increased significantly, rising from \$17 billion in 2002 to \$262 billion in 2014. Since then, China has managed to maintain steady trade with the region, both through bilateral agreements and membership in international free trade zones such as the TPP. In 2018, total Chinese imports from Latin America were valued at \$126 billion while its respective exports to the region totaled \$131 billion (Sullivan & Lum, 2018). Today, China is the primary trading partner for Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay (Ramon-Berjano, 2019).

Another major Chinese initiative in the region has been the Five-Year Plan for 2015-2019 in collaboration with the 32 countries that comprise the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). In contrast to Russia's emphasis on military collaboration, China's Five-Year Plan aims to develop the region in terms of energy and natural resources, infrastructure, agriculture, scientific innovation, as well as information technology (Ramon-Berjano, 2019). The last of these is particularly important for China, as Latin America presents

a considerable market for China's growing telecommunications sector, making it another battleground for global competition with United States rivals. Although CELAC includes the members of the ALBA bloc, China has played a more direct role in aiding those countries whose technological development has been restricted by United States sanctions. For example, China has given Venezuela access to its own launch sites to send telecommunications satellites into space (Kelly, 2017).

4. Geopolitics in the Western Hemisphere after Trump

Two decades after the United States began its gradual withdrawal from Latin America and the Caribbean, the geopolitical situation in the western hemisphere is at a critical historical moment. The isolationist foreign policy of the Trump administration further intensified the United States' withdrawal from Latin America, producing early signs of a hegemonic vacuum in the region. Though these signs may have been overlooked by the United States, whose foreign policy remains focused on the Middle East, rival powers have not only noticed the United States' withdrawal but have acted assertively to fill the growing void. With Brazil becoming increasingly comfortable in its newfound role as a regional leader and Russia and China beginning to replace the United States as Latin America's military and economic benefactors, the United States must finally come to terms with the fact that the hegemony it had taken for granted since the end of the Cold War may soon be undermined by its own negligence of the region. For this reason, the Biden

administration will be faced with the crucial task of reversing recent trends and setting a new agenda for United States foreign policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Critical of President Trump's condescending rhetoric towards the United States' southern neighbors, the Biden administration has promised to go beyond returning to President Obama's DACA program and extending TPS to a greater number of asylum seekers when addressing immigration reform. Instead, President Biden has causally linked the United States' migrant crisis to the deeply rooted socioeconomic issues at the source of migration in Central America. According to the vision described in the Biden Plan to Build Security and Prosperity in Partnership with the People of Central America,

the Western Hemisphere has the potential to be secure, democratic, and prosperous from the northern reaches of Canada all the way to the southern tip of Chile. Critical to achieving this goal is ensuring that the nations of Central America –especially El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the Northern Triangle countries– are strong, secure, and capable of delivering futures of opportunity for their own people (Biden, 2020).

To make this hemispheric vision a reality, President Biden has proposed a four-year, \$4 billion regional strategy to promote economic development and strengthen security in Central America. Moreover, he has also stated his interest in convening a summit of regional leaders to cooperate in tackling endemic structural problems like crime and corruption (Biden, 2020).

While such initiatives may help improve relations with Mexico and Central America, there is still considerable work to be done with respect to the United States' role in the Caribbean and South America. Beginning

with Cuba, the Biden administration should continue President Obama's efforts to restore diplomatic and economic relations with the country. In response to the Trump administration's campaign to undo President Obama's progressive Cuba policy, over 100 members of Cuba's emerging business community who had managed to establish relations with members of the United States private sector and Congress sent a joint letter to President Trump imploring that he capitalizes on his predecessor's reforms (de Bhal, 2018). The stated purpose of the letter was to inform President Trump that "additional measures to increase travel, trade and investment, including working with the U.S. Congress to lift the embargo, will benefit [Cuban] companies, the Cuban people and U.S. national interests" (Engage Cuba Coalition, 2016). Though the letter ultimately failed to persuade President Trump to reconsider his approach to Cuba, it was significant in that it showed the willingness of the emerging Cuban middle class to cooperate with the United States. If the economic embargo continues under President Biden, however, Cuba will have no other choice but to continue looking to United States rivals like Russia for support.

Though ending the economic embargo against Cuba could prove to be a decisive step towards ending Russian influence in the country, Russia's military and economic ties with Nicaragua and Venezuela continue to be problematic. In 2018, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported a developing humanitarian crisis in Nicaragua amid repression by state authorities, while the OAS noted the occurrence of systematic human rights violations in Venezuela that same year (Adams, 2019). The political crisis in Venezuela has also

had regional ramifications, as tensions between the country and many of its neighbors have prompted most UNASUR members, including Brazil, to abandon the organization in favor of the recently established Forum for the Progress and Development of South America (PROSUR), which excludes Venezuela. In the midst of continued instability in Venezuela as well as the dissolution of the Brazilian-led UNASUR bloc, the United States now has an opportunity to cooperate with its South American partners in what has become the region's greatest security threat since the Colombian peace process ended the FARC insurgency in 2016. To do so, the Biden administration should go beyond the impotent Rio Treaty to create a viable hemispheric defense pact that would not only be responsive to regional crises but would simultaneously prevent Russian and Chinese incursion into the region.

More like NATO than the short-lived and symbolic IAPF or CPF contingents that served to create a pretense of legitimacy for United States military interventions during the Cold War, a real Pan-American Security Organization could allow the United States to assume a position of regional leadership while cooperating and fostering mutually beneficial relations with its Latin American and Caribbean allies. Unlike the highly industrialized countries of NATO that are capable of manufacturing much of their own security equipment, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean would provide a considerable regional market for the United States military-industrial complex, thus easing the economic burden of the United States and making its allies less dependent on pursuing arms deals with Russia and technological innovation with China to meet their security and development

needs. Moreover, conducting joint military exercises like the ones that NATO already organizes in response to Russian activity on its western border would serve the important purpose of building regional solidarity and reassuring countries like Costa Rica that the United States is still committed to upholding their security and preserving their territorial integrity.

However, given the lingering memory of United States interventionism in Latin America and the Caribbean from the 19th century to the Cold War period, certain concessions would have to be made in order to reassure regional allies that efforts to reclaim hegemony would not require history to repeat itself. Firstly, the formation of a Pan-American Security Council would be necessary to ensure that any military actions undertaken would be legitimately multilateral, humanitarian in nature, and executed in accordance with the principles of RtoP and RwP. Secondly, rising regional powers like Brazil and advanced economies like Argentina would have to be incentivized to participate rather than coerced into cooperation. Thirdly, a defense treaty would have to be supported with development funding and other soft power initiatives through institutions like USAID and the IDP to target the socioeconomic sources of regional instability and insecurity. Fourthly, good diplomatic relations between the United States and its southern neighbors would have to be fostered by respecting international norms and mandates, such as the International Court of Justice's recognition of Colombia's claims to the Bajo Nuevo and Serranilla Banks, which the United States still disputes for possession in accordance with the Guano Islands Act of 1856. Finally, cultivating trust and respect through mutual defense should

be accompanied by lowering barriers to trade and travel in order to stimulate the exchange of goods and ideas between neighbors within the western hemisphere.

5. Conclusion

Throughout most of United States history, Latin America and the Caribbean have played a central role in the country's foreign policy. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, a series of expansionist wars and territorial treaties led the United States to become the dominant economic and military power in the region, allowing it to effectively establish hegemony in the western hemisphere. This hegemony went undisputed until the Cold War, during which the Soviet Union tried to spread its influence in the region by supporting communist movements like those that took power in Cuba and Nicaragua. To defend its hegemony, the United States was forced to abandon the prospect of becoming a good neighbor, instead adopting a variety of coercive tactics like funding counterinsurgencies and conducting military interventions. However, with the Soviet Union's ultimate defeat, the United States was finally able to foster friendly relations with the region. United States hegemony in the 1990s was thus marked by soft power initiatives such as the pursuit of economic liberalization, the promotion of democracy, and cooperation in combating international crime.

This period of preserving hegemony would nevertheless prove to be short-lived. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States turned its foreign policy focus away from Latin America and towards the Middle East. During this time, plans to create a

regional trade bloc were abandoned, and growing frustration with the difficulties of economic development resulted in the formation of the revisionist ALBA bloc. As the United States continued to distance itself from the region, Brazil has acted assertively to become a rising economic, political, and military power. Meanwhile, Russia has begun to regain some of its lost influence in Latin America by establishing a network of allies that have become dependent on it for economic and military support. Perhaps more significantly, China has already become the primary trading partner for a few Latin American countries as it continues to integrate the region into its own sphere of influence through investments and development initiatives.

Given this state of affairs, President Biden has inherited a critical geopolitical situation in Latin America and the Caribbean. If the United States is to preserve its hegemony in the western hemisphere and provide an alternative to economic and military dependence on Russia and China, then the Biden administration will have to drastically reform relations with Latin America. To do so, he will first have to begin by reframing the United States' southern migration crisis. By addressing the socioeconomic causes of migration from Central America and Mexico, his administration has a chance to take the lead in working towards a regional solution that would not only strengthen security on the United States' southern border but could also improve the lives of countless potential migrants struggling to survive in severely underdeveloped communities. Secondly, he will have to face the challenge of improving economic and military relations with the region, so as to make the United States a more attractive alternative to development than Russia or China.

By proposing a Pan-American Security Organization as a cooperative mechanism to counter the region's security threats and returning to the pursuit of economic and political integration with the region, the United States could begin to regain its hegemony in the western hemisphere. But before beginning to convince its southern neighbors to give it precedence over rivals like Russia or China, the United States should first take an introspective look at its own history in the region and give Latin America a reason to believe that hemispheric solidarity is worth pursuing.

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